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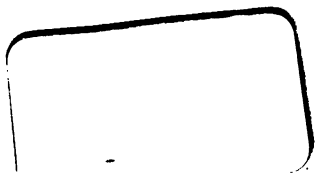
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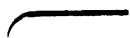
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IN LOVE AND IN HATE.

VOL. II.

IN LOVE AND IN HATE.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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IN LOVE AND IN HATE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MESSENGER.

‘**W**HAT hot work it is,’ said a French soldier wiping his brow.

8 ‘Ay,’ answered a comrade, ‘climbing hills when one has perfect leisure is pleasant exercise, but with an enemy potting at you the thing becomes rather exciting.’

‘At the hill, my men,’ called out a clear voice.

Readily and cheerfully the French soldiers formed into line, and prepared to renew the assault they had already tried without success. The bugles sounded the charge and away they went up the steep slope. There were cannon on the heights and cannon on the plain busily engaged in shelling the advancing force. Old General Lebrun, himself on foot, led the attack—one of those desperate charges which give the sternest denial to the supposition that it was lack of courage which lost the battles of the French.

Crash went the musketry fire, and clear amidst the thunder of the guns rang out the cheer which proclaimed that the Germans were falling back defeated from the hill that surmounts Bazeilles.

‘So far good,’ remarked the General, ‘but we have as yet only commenced our work. They are likely to shelter in the woods there, and we must try to clear them out of it.’

‘See, yonder, General,’ cried an officer near.

‘What! the town on fire. By Heaven, they are shelling the open town in revenge for their defeat here.’

‘I can with my glass count five or six different places blazing.’

‘Oh, ’tis too plain. Lambeau must have driven them out, and they are now adopting this course. They fight well—with cannon,’ added the old General bitterly.

A messenger panting but swift of foot here came up and handed the General a dispatch. It was torn open and read in haste with a grumbling comment. ‘“Want immediate help”—of course—that’s what we all want—“Confident that if I had two thousand men more I should be able to trample out the assailing force.” But where the devil are they to come from? “The enemy is shelling the town, and our only chance is to make a straight attack on him and carry his guns.” No doubt the fellow knows what he is about, Colonel.’

'General,' replied the officer addressed.

'Can we spare two thousand men to help Lambeau yonder?'

'We cannot spare two.'

'You have heard what this officer has said?' asked the General addressing himself to the messenger.

'I have heard, mon Général,' answered Michel Voss.

'Repeat that to Brigadier Lambeau. Stay. I have not time to write. Add also that I believe if there is one who can do great things with small means it is he.'

Flushed with pleasure at this praise of a commander he so admired, Sergeant Voss saluted and retired at a pace that a horseman would have found it difficult to equal.

As he passed along the road which led from the heights down to the town he found that the post of messenger was scarcely less perilous than that of soldier. Around him were pretty gardens, trim cottages, here and there an auberge such as belongs to flourishing rural districts. It was the ideal scene in which to place the abode of peaceful industry. Now the desolation of a desert would have been preferable. Up the hill whence he had just descended there went on the incessant tumult of fire-arms; on the other side of the town the cannon were belching their terrors. Odd shells flew right across his path,

or struck into the small houses which were near. There was a charming garden he had noticed on his way up. Rich flowers decked its little beds, luscious fruits—that to the parched palate of the messenger hurrying in oh how hot a haste, seemed like the fruits of Paradise—hung from the small, carefully-tended trees. A very old man, with a dazed expression, holding a large pair of hedge-clippers in one hand, was with the aid of the other examining some bushes, now and then raising his head in a sort of childish wonder at the terrific noises that were filling the air. As Michel returned with his swift sling trot, he cast a glance at the peaceful spot which had attracted his attention. Under the bush there lay the old man on his face, the clippers held still in his outstretched hand, stone dead. He had, on his journey to the hill, noticed a young woman hurriedly putting hats and capes on two young children, with the view of rushing from her house. Through the open window he could see the plump, rosy baby asleep in the cradle. As he came back, the woman was emerging from the house. A little one was holding to her gown and crying piteously; another held her by one hand. On the other arm lay the baby. Her own forehead was bleeding. A shell had struck the house and torn away the porch. The beam fell down, striking her and making the wound which bled, and half stunned her. The same blow had killed the

infant, which now lay dead in the arms of the mother, who had not yet reached the knowledge of her sorrow, and was hurrying on as she supposed towards shelter for the child that now needed no protection. Michel, at a glance, read the story. He groaned and sped on.

As he passed the way grew thick with frightened, flying people. Here were an aged couple mounted in a donkey-cart, there were a pair of children grasping each other's hands, and hastening away, poor innocents, they knew not whither. Farther on he saw a father calling distractedly for the petite he had missed from his side, and groaning with terror for himself and her; then a wife, hurrying her husband and children. Cattle were mixed up with the people; the large, lumbering horses, owing to their constitutional phlegm, showed generally no disposition to be restive, but one, snorting in agony of fear, plunged through the crowd, scattering them and doing no small amount of destruction. As a shell passed near the heads of the flying multitude or buried itself in some of the fields near, exploding with terrific violence, a wild shriek would go up which crowned the horror of a scene already too awful.

Michel threaded his way amidst this sorrowful crowd so skilfully that he scarcely slackened speed, though all the time his heart was bursting with pity and rage. As he got to the outskirts he found the crowd still increasing, but now

the military uniform was mingled with the civilian dress.

‘Are you retreating?’ he called to a soldier who was limping back, but yet seemed not to be badly wounded.

‘The town is on fire, and it is like a hell to be in it,’ was the reply.

He hurried still, and at last came to the square in the centre of which, on horseback, was Brigadier Lambeau. This square was intersected by the principal street, up whose length you could see past the suburban road, and right on to the low hills covered with woods and orchards. From the midst of these the German cannon was sending forth its tempest of explosions upon the devoted town. Far away up the street, at cautious distance, the enemy were keeping up a musketry fire, which was returned by the French troops nearer. Michel rushed up panting, and delivered his message to the Brigadier.

‘Always our cursed luck,’ cried the officer to the major near him. ‘If he could have spared us the men it would have been easy to drive those beggars before us, and I am satisfied we would have captured the cannon.’

‘What is to be done now?’

‘Good Heavens, there is nothing for it but retreat. Our few could never drive that mass, especially with that vast artillery behind it. If we remain we only get the town destroyed with-

out being able to make any impression on the foe.'

'Shall I have the retreat sounded?'

'No. The thing must be done quietly. Let skirmishers hold the streets until the main body has got back on the Sedan road.'

The movement was quietly and effectually accomplished. The Bavarians were firing for a quarter of an hour without being aware that there were not twenty men in the town opposed to them. At last the slackness of the musketry began to cause them to suspect the truth: they pushed boldly on, and they had possession of the town of Bazeilles.

CHAPTER II.

A FIRE.

THE struggle had been severe, and the destruction wrought within the houses and on the streets was startling to behold. A large house on the square was rent from top to bottom as by an earthquake. Through the cellar some miserable faces peered, the lull in the firing having given room for the hope that the danger was passed. This was only the type of a number. Everywhere about was heard the cracking of beams, the rushing of roofs, the shrieks of the wounded or the terror-stricken, and above all the din of the infernal shells which still came crashing into the town. These ceased after a little, when it became evident that the German troops had penetrated it, but the horror did not diminish. A woman ran out bearing on her shoulders the dead body of her husband. She staggered under her burden, then fell alongside it, and his blood stained her dress. Several other women dashed into the broad square and with some vague notion of a barricade heaved up any débris they could find. They snatched muskets from the dead soldiers lying around, and

fired them, doing, as might be expected, little or no damage. But there was a hoarse roar, and their absurd barricade was clambered over and surrounded, and they themselves disarmed and bound.

‘Where is the Oberst?’ said one of the captives.

‘He is coming.’

The Oberst marched up.

‘What are these?’ he asked.

‘Women who have fired on us.’

‘Ha. Twenty of them. Take ten and put them against yonder house and shoot them. Keep the other ten and hang them to-morrow.’

Where were the shrieks as the doom of these women was pronounced? There were none. The order was promptly executed. Bound together, sullen and silent, they were placed against the shutters of one of the houses and a volley was fired at them. They fell writhing; then another and another were discharged, and the ten women were corpses.

As the sound of the muskets died away there was one sharp rifle report and the Oberst staggered and fell dead, his last groan mingling with those of the victims he had put to death. The female prisoners, still bound and under sentence of execution, sent up a shrill shout of exultation as they saw the fall of the butcher. From the quarter whence the rifle-shot had been heard

there now rang out a volley, every bullet of which carried death on its wings. The Germans reeled and fluttered.

‘Burn the town, bring petroleum,’ cried out a dozen voices.

A shout answered to the suggestion, and immediately a hundred hands were engaged in setting fire to the houses.

At the window of a considerable shop there appeared a woman with a pistol in her hand. She held it to her shoulder quite deliberately and fired.

‘Ha, *die Hexe!* Burn her and her house,’ was roared from below.

A rush was made by a dozen. On the way four fell, pierced by the bullets from an unseen foe. The rest dashed in the door, flung themselves up the staircase, and broke into the room whence she had been seen to fire. As they entered they saw lying on a table in the centre of the room the bodies of two men dead, with blood dripping from their heads. Standing behind the table, tall, erect, with long grey hair streaming down her shoulders, was the woman who had fired from the window. In her hand she held the pistol.

‘Do you know who these are?’ she cried aloud in accents that might have sent a shudder through hearers less fierce and excited, and which made even them pause. ‘Do you know who these are?’ she continued, her voice rising still more shrilly.

Answering her own question she continued. 'There is my husband slain by one of the accursed cannon with which you make war on peaceable old men; and there—there,' she cried with a wild yell, 'there is my son, shot by your savage hordes in cold blood because he defended his country.'

'Surrender, put down your pistol,' called out a sergeant.

'Surrender!' she yelled, 'surrender! No, I have already shot three of your ruffians, and one more at least shall die.' So saying she fired the pistol point blank into the group.

A man tottered and fell. There was a growl and a rush, and the old woman was overpowered and disarmed.

'Place her up against yonder door,' cried the sergeant.

Two men held her.

'Now, who is strong enough to pin her to the door with a bayonet?'

'I,' cried a giant, drawing back a few paces and levelling his musket.

As he was stepping forward to do his fearful task crash came a bullet through the glass and he staggered forward and fell.

'Old devil,' was the cry, 'it is your fault.' There was a new rush and half-a-dozen bayonets were buried in the wretched woman's body.

'Now, burn the house,' was exclaimed.

'Let the bodies of these brave people be dis-

posed of as those of the ancient Romans,' exclaimed a university student in private's uniform who had taken part in the massacre.

Matches were struck and fire applied, and the party descended. As they emerged from the door the university student fell. After him rushed the sergeant, and he fell too.

'These bullets come from that broad house at the other side of the square,' shouted one of the survivors. They rushed across. Before they had gone a dozen paces two more of them dropped.

'Ah,' groaned one of the stricken soldiers, as he lay upon the ground, 'that fatal house is well avenged.'

But the building whence these deadly missives were sent had not escaped other attention. It was a stone house, which had once been a bank, but now was used as a pawn office. The lower windows were heavily barred outside, beside being furnished with strong shutters within. It had a stone portico supported upon two pillars, from the front of which carved in granite rose an elaborate ornament, the work of the Louis Quinze period. It was large enough to afford ample cover for a man from a shot fired straight in front, while even two men could find moderate protection behind it. The sides of the portico also bore stone ornaments, but of lesser size. Five windows opened into the room, which had once been the salon of the banquier, but now was

filled with the pledges of the pawn-broker. One of these gave access to the little platform over the portico.

‘Begor, Michel, you nailed that ruffian nicely,’ said one of two men crouched on the portico, as the shot had arrested in death the German who was going to impale the old woman.

‘It was a fair shot,’ said Michel, ‘but, mon ami, your shooting is as good.’

‘Bother,’ was Mike Mahony’s remark in English.

‘And they are doing good work from the windows,’ added Michel.

The conversation was interrupted by a hail of bullets which rattled off the stone-work, sent the flattened lead falling back from the walls, and produced a loud crashing of glass.

Inside the house were nearly a company of soldiers under the command of a brave and intelligent young officer. The pawned goods, which consisted in great part of woollen and linen materials, were piled behind the open windows, and served as gabions for the soldiers, who kept up a well-directed and steady fire upon the enemy in the street. Already they had inflicted a sharp punishment for the brutalities that went on before their eyes, while as yet their own loss was comparatively small. But now the enemy had begun to concentrate attention on the spot which had hitherto wrought so much damage in their ranks.

'Der Teufel!' exclaimed one officer, 'if we do not get down that damned house, we shall be all shot down one by one.'

'It cannot stand long, the houses near it are all burning.'

'Ay, it does one's heart good to hear the crushing of these abominable French, but it is slow work.'

'Could we not manage to fire that house itself?'

'Not well, it seems of stone. Is the back guarded?'

'There are two companies there.'

'Come, something must be done. Petroleum will set fire to it.'

'I don't know that we have any left. It has mostly been used casting down into the cellars where these brutes went for refuge.'

'A dozen volunteers wanted!' cried the first officer, who with his companion was standing behind the barricade or rather mass of rubbish which the poor maniac women had raised against the advancing foe.

'Here, here, here!' was shouted.

'I want a dozen men to go and fire the door of yonder house.'

The 'heres' were not repeated.

Mortified, the officer called to a sergeant standing near, 'Take twelve men and go to set that door on fire.'

The sergeant saluted, and selected at once twelve men. There was no alacrity—the task was evidently not much relished—but the men fell into rank resolutely and without a word.

‘A cheer for the volunteers,’ called the officer.

A cheer was given, but the men themselves did not join.

‘Vorwärts,’ said the officer.

‘Vorwärts,’ said the sergeant, and the men stepped from outside the shelter. The moment they did so two shots rang out from the stone ornament over the portico, and two men fell.

‘Der Teufel!’ repeated the officer.

As he spoke, crash came a volley from the windows, and the little party going to fire the door lost half its number. The remainder struggled on, the sergeant still bravely at their head.

‘Come, lads,’ said he, ‘a run, once under the portico they cannot hurt us.’

As he spoke, a bullet struck him in the chest. The ball exploded a small can of petroleum he held in his hand, and, as the wretched man fell, a fierce flame wrapped him round. Horror seized his companions; they faltered, turned and fled back to the heap.

‘Coward!’ said the officer, striking the first he met with his gloved fist.

The man made no reply, but silently slunk in among his comrades.

‘This will not do,’ said the second officer.

'You cannot get down that house without a gun.'

'Send then in haste.'

A messenger left.

As he got outside the barricade he fell.

'Der Teufel!' exclaimed the officer once more.

'Ha, I hear the artillery approaching!'

The rumble of wheels made itself audible, and the foremost men of a battery appeared on the square. The moment they did so a fierce shower of bullets from the house made itself felt, but though it did execution, it did not stay progress. One gun was brought to the barricade, to the great joy of the officer in command. He quickly pointed out the necessity of strong measures, and the gun was planted right opposite the doomed house. Every movement was visible to the two men without and to the little garrison within, and they understood perfectly that their day was done. But with none the less spirit did they maintain their fierce resistance.

Before a shell was fired two gunners had fallen. But it could not be averted, and at last the shell flew. It struck a corner of one of the windows on the uppermost floor in which only a few soldiers had been stationed, discharged itself into the room, burst up a portion of the ceiling, and shook the roof. Fragments of stone flew in showers, one, of no inconsiderable size, falling on the kepi of one of the men guarding the portico.

'Well,' said the man, 'Jimmy the Inkbottles used to say I had no brains, and I never believed him; but I do now. If I were fool enough to have brains that crack would have knocked them out.'

'You will have another trial soon,' remarked Michel coolly, 'let us try the gunners again.'

Once more the gunners paid a heavy dividend of death, but once again the shell came. This time it burst in a window of the salon. Within several soldiers were killed, part of the woodwork was set on fire, and a complete langrage of stone fell around the men on the portico, but luckily without inflicting more than a few slight cuts.

'Come in, men,' said the French officer.

The two men cautiously entered the window which opened from the portico.

'The house is on fire; do you know if there is water to be had?'

'I will try.'

Michel went below, and returned for answer 'The well is dry.'

While he was away, two shells one after another came through the windows. Nearly forty men lay groaning with wounds or still in death on the floor. The flames grew, filling the apartment with smoke.

'Our struggle is vain,' said the gallant young officer with a sigh. 'I must do it,' and he held

a white handkerchief on the end of his sword through the window.

The firing outside ceased, but the flames within rose higher and higher.

'Down the stairs, men,' said the officer, 'and open the door. As we have surrendered there is no use in being roasted.'

'Mike,' whispered Michel.

'What's up?' returned his comrade in the same tone.

'The well is dry.'

'So am I, I'm sorry to say.'

'We can escape by it.'

As the bulk of the men moved out to the front of the house, the comrades stole softly through a back door into a large yard, in the centre of which was a well twenty feet deep with a bucket and chain. One after the other they descended and hid.

As the French party marched out they were received by the gallant officer who had commanded behind the barricade.

'How many men,' said the German, who spoke in French with tolerable fluency, 'do you surrender with?'

'Twelve,' said the Frenchman after counting heads.

'Point me out the two who were on the portico.'

The young officer was startled. He felt that

the request boded ill to the gallant soldiers. Had they been present he would have refused, but looking round he saw they were not amongst the prisoners.

‘I cannot,’ he replied, ‘they are not here.’

‘Where are they?’

‘Dead, no doubt.’

‘Der Teufel!’ said the officer again, ‘I should so liked to have hanged them.’

And now the house which had stood so long and gallant a siege added its huge contribution of flame to the burning town. High up in a great column the blaze rose, burned fiercely for a while, and then, sullenly subsiding for lack of food, sent angry showers of sparks and charred wood through the atmosphere. Some of the sparks fell into the well where our comrades crouched, but they carried no danger with them.

As night fell, they climbed severally the chain and emerged to the upper air. The destruction of the house had removed all watch from it, and they were able to look around freely. By the light of the smouldering fires they could see something of the havoc which had been made. It seemed a city of the dead. Gaping apertures instead of windows, blackened gables standing out horribly against the sky, streets piled high with the ruins of the tumbled houses, gave ghastly evidence of the destruction wrought. Not a single dwelling could they see which had escaped

the fire. Cautiously they stole out. Their way was through perils from falling ruins, and over obstacles from the piles which had already been heaped up. Corpses open-eyed stared up at them from the ground. The front of one house was standing and the bracket of a projecting sign thrust itself out. Something swung from it in the night air. As they got near they found it was the body of a woman. Through unending horrors they discovered a path unguarded, the victors in the hideous fight being averse to run the risk of a watch amid the falling ruins. And so, under the still and sombre night, they reached without molestation the road to Sedan.

As they got upon a slight eminence they turned to look at the town. Its place was distinctly marked by the dun canopy which overhung it, and the lurid light that rose from its embers. For a few moments they contemplated the sad sight in silence.

‘This,’ said Michel at last, in a tone of suppressed emotion, ‘is the way that Germany makes war upon us. Old men done to death, women butchered, babes trampled out of life, towns fired! God grant that my poor arm may be spared to punish some of the infamies of which they are guilty.’

‘Amen,’ said his companion solemnly, and they proceeded on their road in the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

A WOUND.

‘I WOULDN’T care to live in a well for a long time,’ remarked Monsieur Mahony to his companion, as the two men, escaped from Bazeilles, stood upon the height between it and Sedan.

‘No, it is not pleasant.’

‘But something can be said for it when the well is dry.’

‘No doubt.’

‘But now, Michel, what can be said for this bed under an apple tree, with the grass so wet that it seems like taking a swim to lie down there?’

‘Nothing, except perhaps that we had no other.’

‘Well, may be there’s something in that, too. But I’d rather have more breakfast than an apple affords. I was fond of apples in my youth,’ added the speaker in a thoughtful vein, ‘and suffered for them in a small way, such as black eyes and barked shins; but somehow my fancy appears to be clean gone. I would exchange willingly these rosy cheeks for a loaf of bread.’

‘There’s no help. We must bear hunger as well as we can for the present.’

‘Oh, for that matter, I flatter myself an Irishman can bear starvation as well as any man going. You see we had great practice in my country.’

‘Are your arms all right?’

‘I think everything is wet about me except the powder. That’s dry. And, by the way, it’s a very extraordinary thing I’m dry myself too. Wet as I am I could swallow at this blessed moment a quart of a liquor I’d name to you, if there was the slightest chance of getting it.’

‘Allons.’

‘For the liquor?’

‘No, to join the army.’

‘Would you object to my singing a little stave to keep my heart up as we’re going along? A song is light food for a hungry man, but it’s quite sure that we’ve got nothing else.’

‘It is scarcely daylight yet, and the enemy must be all about. Your song would, like that of other minstrels, be likely to procure you a cage.’

‘What a nice bird I’d be—a goose, I dare say, I’d be called.’

Chatting in such fashion the men, who had spent a night of terrible privation, the damp of heavy dews following their long sojourn in the mouldering pit where once the water had rested, and destitute of food for nearly eighteen hours, trudged along the road to Sedan.

The village of Balan lies between Bazeilles and Sedan. As they stood at an elevation of the road

which commanded at once the village and the sacked and burning town they had quitted, they paused.

‘It is well to reconnoitre,’ remarked Michel. ‘These Prussians are everywhere. Their numbers must be absolutely prodigious.’

‘I declare to the lord,’ remarked Mike Mahony, ‘I’m so hungry I’d like to have something inside me, if ’twas only a bullet. God forgive me for telling lies, though,’ he added hastily, ‘I’m not within two hours of that yet.’

The grey curtain of the dawn was rising, and in the village below movement could be seen. Most of the houses were closed, but military uniforms might be discerned, a few horsemen being visible with some infantry.

‘They must be ours,’ said Mike, ‘for they don’t seem to be looking out for anything. It would be hard to get so near them infernal Germans without a bullet flying somewhere near your skull.’

‘I think you are right,’ remarked Michel with a sigh; ‘we may go on to the village without fear.’

As they approached their views were confirmed. A small peloton of cavalry could be seen lounging in the streets. From their shining brass helmets fell long horse-hair plumes. Their coats were green but with a breast of yellow. The red trousers of the line was stuffed into their heavy jack boots.

‘There’s no mistake about them, at all events,’ remarked Mike.

‘We had better procure some bread here.’

‘With all my heart—and a great deal more.’

None of the village shops were open, but there were few people in the place not on the alert. In the windows could be seen night-capped heads popping out, mostly with a scared and anxious look. The people had seen or heard of the fate that befell their neighbours at Bazeilles the day before, and terror at the possibility of a similar tragedy being enacted within their confines had taken possession of them. At another time a small body of cavalry might have passed through in the morning twilight without more notice than a peep from some more than usually restless old woman, but the excitement was such now that every military movement thrilled through the inhabitants. It was not, therefore, difficult for the comrades to arouse a shopkeeper, though to get served with the bread and wine they required was not by any means so simple a matter. Fears had to be appeased, assurance made, and all but threats employed before a thin, hungry-looking man was induced to descend and supply the required stores.

‘Pardon, messieurs,’ said he, ‘for the delay, but we have been so shaken by a terrible occurrence that took place near us yesterday, and of which doubtless you have not heard, that we do not know where to turn.’

‘You mean the burning and massacre at Bazeilles?’

‘I do.’

‘We happened to be there.’

The shopkeeper almost shrieked. ‘Great Heavens, were you in the midst of all that carnage and horror?’

‘Yes. We escaped with some difficulty.’

‘Ay,’ added Mike, ‘and a deal of hunger.’

‘Who are these soldiers, and what are they doing here?’ asked an officer who rode up to the door.

‘French soldiers who escaped yesterday from Bazeilles, and were in the midst of all the horrors’—burst out the shopkeeper brimful of the subject.

‘Be silent, and let the soldiers speak for themselves.’

Michel in a few words explained the occurrences of the preceding day.

‘To what division do you belong?’

‘We are sergeants of the 150th of the line, but we have been put into Brigadier Lambéau’s corps of scouts.’

‘Ha, the Brigadier will be here before long; you had better wait and report yourselves to him.’

‘In a little time more horsemen were seen to approach. The number was not much greater than that already in the village, but this time it was apparent that officers of rank were amongst them. Brilliant uniforms could be seen amid the glanc-

ing of the drawn weapons and the shining helmets.

They entered the village.

‘Oh, be japers—’ shouted Mike.

‘Hush, man,’ said Michel sternly.

‘Mais tonnerre et—quel diable est le Français pour turf?’

‘Be silent, I tell you,’ repeated Michel.

‘Well, no doubt you are right,’ acknowledged Mike, ‘but my heart warms when I see a blood relation, and there he is, the darling Marshal.’

There was a movement in the troop. The guard already in the village presented arms, and then the officer rode forward, and spoke to one of the new comers, whom Michel and his comrade easily recognized as Brigadier Lambeau. Presently, a summons came to the two men, and they proceeded forward to their sharp-visaged commander.

‘So you have been in difficulties again?’

‘Yes, Brigadier.’

‘And got out of them, I perceive.’

‘Why, your honour,’ said Mike apologetically, ‘it would be impossible to get out of them without first getting in.’

The Brigadier laughed, but presently his face got grave again.

‘What do you know of the movements of the enemy?’

‘Not much, Brigadier. They must have quite evacuated Bazeilles, for the house from which we

escaped is in the centre of the town, and though we met plenty of corpses of our poor countrymen and countrywomen—ay, and little children—and some bodies of dead Germans, we did not meet a single soldier.'

'Have you any idea of their direction?'

'Judging from camp fires we saw last night, I should fancy they would be in force about two miles to the westward of Bazeilles.'

'You did not go closer?'

'Brigadier, we were utterly exhausted from the events of the day and the want of food and sleep.'

'No doubt, good fellow, I am sure you have not been wanting to your duties. Do you think you could point out the place where you supposed the encampment was last night?'

'Yes, I am sure I can.'

'Come this way, then.' Riding forward a few paces, the Brigadier came to the centre of the troop where, accompanied by two or three staff-officers in full uniform, but himself in his plainest every-day costume, Marshal MacMahon sat on horseback. His face was pale though calm, but there might be fancied a look of suppressed excitement in his eyes. A keen observer could trace in his countenance something of the effects of nearly a month of disaster and trouble.

'Marshal, these men have escaped from Bazeilles.'

‘Ha, have I not seen them before?’

‘I had the honour of presenting them to you as two of the men I proposed to employ in scouting.’

‘Ah, Marshil——’

‘Ho, ho, my Irish friend, is this you again?’

‘It is, your honour, and if I might make so bold as to mention to you a little matter I think it would be a great satisfaction to you and to myself.’

Mike was in the full tide of a speech he had carefully composed in his best French, designed to enlighten the Marshal on the subject of the affinity he claimed, when Brigadier Lambeau ruthlessly interposed.

‘Marshal, these men believe they saw last night the camp of the enemy pitched after having evacuated Bazeilles.’

‘Ha, then let me see the spot.’

‘It will be necessary, M. le Maréchal, to go a little way out of the village, in the Bazeilles direction, in order to see it.’

‘Go forward then.’

Immediately the small troop were in motion. In about ten minutes they had reached the spot where a short time before the friends had reconnoitred the village, and from which Bazeilles and Balan could both be seen. As the Marshal’s eye lit upon the burned town, he could not help a start of horror.

'Good God,' he exclaimed, 'what a way for a civilized nation to make war. But I have not time to think of that now. Point me out the place where you think the enemy camped.'

Michel pointed across the river and beyond the railroad to a gentle acclivity about a mile and a half distant.

The Marshal raised his glass to his eye.

'You are right,' he said; 'they are in considerable force over there.'

As he spoke a movement could be seen going on, and presently a puff of smoke showed itself in the mass. A few seconds pass, a rush is heard over their heads, and away flies a shell burying itself in a garden three hundred yards off.

'They are on the alert,' remarked the Marshal. 'I wish I could know something of their strength. They may mean a real attack in this direction, though it is not likely.'

'This little hill here commands a good view, M. le Maréchal.'

'Let us go thither.'

The first shell seemed as if it were a sort of signal, for immediately after others burst forth in a frightful rain, some striking the village they had just left, some the road on the farther side to Sedan, but the bulk of them apparently directed to the little reconnoitring party.

'Marshal,' said Brigadier Lambeau, 'I think you had better avoid that hill.'

The Marshal laughed. 'Thanks, my dear Lambeau, but it would hardly answer to leave a duty undone because of a little danger.' And they moved to the spot indicated.

With his glass to his eye, the Marshal availed himself of his new vantage-ground. 'They are quite a full corps, I am sure. And,' he added, as a shell flew close past the group, 'they are making good practice.'

When he had completed his survey, the Marshal turned his horse, and rode slowly down the little declivity towards the road.

'Well, all I can say is,' remarked Mike Mahony to his comrade, 'I wouldn't care a straw to stand on that bit of a hill for an hour if I had to do it, but I'm glad to see *him* out of that. After all, there's but one Duke in the family, and I'd be sore and sorry to lose him.'

As he spoke there was a crash near. The Marshal's horse reared, pawed the air frightfully, and fell back powerless. His rider rolled off and lay prostrate on the sward. A cry of horror burst from every lip, and there was a general rush. The manly form was tenderly extricated from the pressure of the dead animal, and then it was ascertained that the great soldier had sustained a desperate wound.

'Oh, Marshal,' exclaimed hard, stern Brigadier Lambeau, with the tears running down his cheeks, 'would to Heaven it had been I who was struck.'

'Hush, Lambeau,' said the wounded man faintly, 'every one must take his own share. As soon as we get back, tell Ducrot what we have seen—he must take my place—and tell him to be on the alert here—as indeed he must be everywhere.'

'I will take care.'

'Is the bridge across the Chier broken down as I ordered?'

'I am not sure—I fear not.'

A groan was the only response, whether of mental or bodily pain, the hearers could not determine. The sufferer, relieved from both, had fainted.

CHAPTER IV.

A DAY TO BE REMEMBERED.

THE memorable day of Sedan broke upon the French army amidst the thunder of the enemy's guns from the plain lying to the west of the town, in the direction of Domchery. With it came the knowledge that the beloved commander-in-chief was wounded, dying, perhaps dead. It had crept out that General Ducrot, whom the Marshal designated his successor, was not acceptable to the powers at Paris, and that General Wimpffen, an officer but two days returned from Algeria, should act in the Marshal's place.

The battle was not in any one direction, it was everywhere. North, south, east, and west, the French found themselves pressed gradually into an ever-narrowing circle. In many places the raw troops fought indifferently; in many, prodigies of valour were performed. The Reichshoffen charge was repeated by the cavalry half-a-dozen times. Generals exposed themselves personally, officers rode at the head of their troops, the men—even where discipline was wanting and confidence in success had departed—exhibited reckless cour-

age. But conduct good or ill was equally vain ; valour booted not, or only added to the tide of blood which reddened the river that rolled beneath the walls of Sedan. The French were in the interior of a wide basin, and around them, every point of vantage covered, was an army more than three times their number.

‘ Who is that ? ’ asked Mike of his companion.

‘ That’s the new commander-in-chief.’

A general officer, accompanied by several others of inferior rank, rode up to the spot where the comrades, acting as skirmishers, were maintaining a fire upon some of the advanced posts of the enemy. There was a look of anger and vexation on his face.

‘ Brigadier Lambeau,’ he said, ‘ there is absolutely no hope here.’

‘ I confess I cannot see any.’

‘ I have been led into an infernal trap. Put at the head of a beaten army whose positions I hardly knew, to receive the final *coup* of disgrace ! It is too hateful.’

‘ I confess it seems hard.’

‘ There is but one thing to do. The army is lost. I must save the Emperor.’

‘ How is that to be done ? ’

‘ Give me a pencil.’

Tearing a leaf out of his pocket-book, the General wrote in haste and handed the note to his companion, who read :

‘SIRE,—

‘I have determined to force the line which lies in front of General Ducrot and General Lebrun rather than be a prisoner in Sedan. I hope your Majesty will place yourself in the midst of troops who will deem it an honour to open a passage for you.

‘DE WIMPFEN.

‘4 o’clock, 1st Sept.’

‘An aide-de-camp.’

‘There is no mounted aide here, M. le Général,’ said an officer.

‘General, I will have the letter conveyed as fast for you as any mounted officer could do it. Here,’ and he summoned Michel Voss.

‘To the Emperor, at once, and bring back a reply.’

With the speed of an arrow Michel disappeared. He entered the open gates of the town, and made his way through ruins. Houses riddled by shell were falling in the streets; soldiers, civilians, women, and children were killed by the explosives; horses rushed madly through the thoroughfares, adding little, however, to the existing confusion. Some cabarets were open, and as he passed, Michel could see men in uniform carousing within, and hear the strains of a frenzied merriment roaring through the open windows.

‘Why should I carry the cursed weapon any longer?’ shouted a Zouave. ‘It shall never lead another unfortunate Frenchman to slaughter.’

So saying he lifted his chassepot by the barrel, and rapping the stock sharply against the pavement, it smashed. His comrades cheered.

‘Right, mon enfant. It is time to give up fighting when we have ceased to be commanded.’

‘It is time, you mean, to stop when we see we have been betrayed.’

And then arose a chorus of abuse against the incompetence, the selfishness, and the treachery of commanders.

Hurrying on, Michel at last reached the Sous-Préfecture, a handsome, modern house. There was still a sentry at the door, but his musket was placed against one jamb, while he was leaning against the other smoking, and at the same time conversing with some soldiers and civilians who formed a little crowd.

‘Is the Emperor to be seen?’ asked Michel, breathless with the speed he had made.

The sentry nodded without interrupting his conversation, and Michel entered the open door. There was no one to direct him, so on chance he ascended the wide staircase, and came to the door of the salon. That, too, was open. Michel looked in, but he saw no one. Embarrassed he entered the room, stepping softly with the timidity of a person to whom richly-furnished apartments are a stranger. Then he perceived the figure of a man who was gazing out the window, as if watching the work of destruction and confusion that was

going on outside. With his right elbow he leaned against the sash, while the left arm hung by his side. In the hand was a cigar which had become extinguished, as if the smoker had forgotten it.

Aroused by the slight noise Michel's entry had made, he turned. It was the Emperor.

'Who is that?'

'A messenger, Sire, from General Wimpffen,' answered Michel handing the note entrusted to him.

The Emperor opened and read it with a gloomy brow. 'Impossible,' he muttered. Then turning to a door leading into another apartment, 'Major Bontemps,' he called.

A young officer entered hastily.

'See,' said the Emperor, 'what we have come to.'

The Major's face grew pale as he read.

'I will write a reply to him,' said the Emperor.

'And it will be?——'

'A refusal.'

A shade that seemed like disappointment passed over the officer's face, but it was only momentary.

'No doubt, your Majesty is in the right.'

'Enough blood has been shed. I cannot allow more men to be sacrificed for me.'

'Of course not, Sire,' but to Michel's attentive ear there seemed a slight tone of constraint in the acquiescence.

The Emperor sat and wrote a brief note in

which he stated that, owing to the condition of the town and the army outside, there would be a difficulty in his joining him; that in any case he could not make up his mind to sacrifice a great number of his brave soldiers for the sake of his personal safety, and that he was resolved to share the fate of the army. As he looked up to hand this note, he for the first time bestowed a glance at the messenger, who was waiting at a respectful distance from the table.

‘Ha!’ he exclaimed, ‘have I not seen you before?’

‘I had the honour to be spoken to by your Majesty at the railway station at Chalons.’

‘Ah! I remember. I fear you have a perilous task in the delivery of this letter. But you are accustomed to perils, I recollect.’

‘Your Majesty is very condescending to bear it in mind.’

‘I never forget devotion. Go, brave fellow. Here,’ he added, stretching out his hand by a sudden impulse, ‘we, perhaps, shall never meet again.’

Michel bent on one knee, took the offered hand and kissed it, and then fled to the accomplishment of his task.

Even the brief period that had passed appeared to have increased the elements of confusion and peril that prevailed, and Michel found augmenting difficulties in his return. Outside the gates the

ground was strewn with wrecks, limbs of trees scattered about, ground torn up as if by ploughs, horses dead ; here the body of a caisson, there a wheel in pieces, further on a gun carriage, everywhere corpses, and over all a sullen cloud of smoke eddying and whirling about under the influence of the wind, but never entirely cleared off. With habitual swiftness and skill, however, Michel threaded his way to the place where he had left the commander-in-chief, and at last he reached the spot.

The General tore open the note he brought, and read it with eager haste.

‘Curse it!’ he exclaimed as he came to the end.

‘A refusal?’ asked General Lambeau.

‘A refusal,’ was the reply, in a short, bitter tone.

‘General,’ said a staff-officer, ‘there is a report that Bazaine has arrived. I do not know where to trace it, but it is all through this side of the camp.’

‘It is very likely,’ said the General eagerly. ‘It is part of the plan. But who knows it?’

‘Officers and soldiers all say it, but can point to no definite source of information.’

‘I would give my right arm it were true.’

And now from mouth to mouth the word passed, and there could be heard the name ‘Bazaine, Bazaine,’ as if it were a spell to conjure with.

Brigadier Lambeau went forward. ‘Men of

my brigade, up, up. Bazaine has come. We go to meet him.'

Wearied and discouraged as they had been, the troops rose with a cheer. The Brigadier set himself at their head, and to the number of two thousand they dashed along the road to Balan. With a tremendous rush they were on the astonished foe, who retreated at the double from the village. But scarcely were they outside it when the artillery came crashing into their ranks. Undaunted they still pursued the retreating enemy, but now they found he had turned, for strong support came up to him while they were alone, no help having reached from their side.

'Could we flank them and take the guns?' asked a young officer.

Brigadier Lambeau shook his head. 'It is not to be done. Their artillerymen alone are as numerous as our handful, and there are two full divisions in front of us.'

Slowly and steadily, and fighting still, the sorely attenuated brigade made its way back through the village. Amongst the main body the belief in the rumoured help had already disappeared, and there was sore discouragement in every face. Evening had begun to fall, and its gloom appeared to have settled upon all hearts. There was no longer any attempt at a forward movement; the whole force was pressing back with more or less steadiness.

'Brigadier Lambeau,' said General Wimpffen,

as the two soldiers met after the former's gallant attempt at Balan, 'our fortune has not been very favourable, but I must compliment you on your splendid attack on the village.'

'I am very proud, General.'

'You can understand, I dare say, how little I could do to help you.'

'Thoroughly.'

'Things have come to such a pass that there is nothing left but to carry out my original idea. If the Emperor will not be saved I can at least calculate on a sufficient number to force our way through and save French honour.'

'Count on me, General.'

'And on me, and me!' shouted several voices from amongst the thinned staff that surrounded the commander-in-chief.

'I knew it,' said the General, with the first expression of pleasure his face had worn that day.

'Oh, General, look round,' cried one.

The General hurriedly turned his face towards the town. 'What do you mean?' he asked impatiently.

'Look, look.'

'Look at what?' he cried, with an irritated accent.

'The citadel, General.'

The General turned his eyes in the direction pointed out. For a moment he remained dumb, and then a deep groan burst from his lips. A

large white flag floated lazily from the staff that surmounted the tower.

‘A surrender!’ he moaned.

‘It was a pity they didn’t keep one of them sheets of the Emperor’s for the job,’ said Mike Mahony to Michel, as they, in company with the rest of the retreating force, looked up at the flag which seemed to them to scatter shame from every fold.

CHAPTER V.

A CHAPTER OF HISTORY CLOSED.

TWO hours after Michel had left the Sous-Préfecture the street in which it was situated was blocked by a tremendous crowd. Nearly all were military, and officers and soldiers were mingled together in unaccustomed confusion. The frightful shriek of the shell through the air with its horrid crash had ceased, but in its place there was a dull continuous sound, the murmur of many voices that sometimes swelled to a roar. Within General Wimpffen might be seen hastening up the stairs, followed by a few superior officers. Arrived at the door of the apartment into which Michel had before penetrated, he gave a hasty and impetuous knock, very unlike the timid summons usually made at the door of royalty. Pushing in the door, he found himself in presence of the Emperor. This time Napoleon was not alone. He was surrounded by general officers, some old and grizzled, some in the prime of life; every one of them bore upon his breast the decorations which attested long and honourable services. Sadness and depression were on every brow.

‘Ha, Wimpffen,’ said the Emperor, ‘I am glad you are come.’

‘Glad, Sire!’ answered the General in a bitter tone; ‘there is not much to rejoice at, that I can see.’

‘Of course there is not, but I wanted you to make the arrangements.’

‘What arrangements, Sire? I am a beaten soldier. I have made to your Majesty the only proposal I could under the circumstances. Your Majesty has declined it. I did hope even after that to be able to carry a remnant of the army through the cordon of the enemy, but the white flag has prevented me.’

‘It would have been mere slaughter, Wimpffen,’ observed the Emperor.

The General made a grimace.

‘But,’ continued the former, ‘there is no use in discussing that question now. We have acknowledged our defeat, and there is nothing left but to arrange and sign the terms of capitulation.’

‘Then there is nothing left for me but to take my departure. I have the honour to salute your Majesty.’

‘Stay, you forget the document has to be discussed and signed.’

‘Very probably. I know little of such things. French officers, Sire, do not devote themselves much to the study of how to surrender.’

'At all events, that is the case. It must be regularly executed.'

'Eh bien, I cannot help it.'

'But,' and here the manner of the speaker grew a little embarrassed, 'it must be signed by you.'

'By ME!' thundered the General.

'Yes, I regret the painful necessity, and I admit it is very hard on you, but there is no help for it.'

'Sire, I have consented to be placed in the command of a beaten army, in which I hardly knew the face of an officer. I have led it with such skill and fought it with such constancy as I could command. When defeated I was perfectly ready to lay down my life to save your honour. Tear down that accursed rag which floats from the citadel, and I will still either make good my first offer, or we can die together. But to ask me to link my name to an enduring testimony of shame; to ask me to send myself down to history as the commander-in-chief who gave a French Emperor and a French army captive into the hands of the enemy! Sire, my devotion is known to you, I can give your Majesty my life, but I cannot give you my honour.'

Without staying for further remonstrance the General rushed from the apartment. Quarter of an hour after an officer entered it with a letter bearing General Wimpffen's formal resignation of the post of commander-in-chief.

‘Reilly,’ said the Emperor, turning to a General whose scarred cheek and blaze of decorations spoke of many a deed of broil and battle, ‘this will never do. If Wimpffen withdraws there will be such confusion that we shall be subjected to harder terms.’

‘Yet it is hard to blame him, Sire.’

‘You soldiers, I declare, have all but the one idea,’ said the Emperor pettishly.

‘No doubt, Sire,’ responded the General rather stiffly, ‘but it is an idea soldiers would do badly without.’

‘Give me pen and ink,’ said the Emperor, cutting short the discussion, and he sat and wrote:—

‘GENERAL,—

‘You cannot be allowed to resign while it is possible to save the army by an honourable capitulation. You have done your duty all day, do it still. The King of Prussia has accepted an armistice, and I am awaiting his proposals. Believe in my friendship.

‘NAPOLEON.’

Slowly wore the terrible night. In the morning a council of war assembled at the quarters of General Wimpffen. Full thirty-two general officers were present, the sadness of their looks sufficiently betokening the nature of the event they had come to discuss.

‘Messieurs,’ said General Wimpffen, ‘last night I placed my resignation in the hands of the Emperor. He refused to receive it. His Majesty paid me the compliment of considering,’ went on the General bitterly, ‘that I am best suited to perform the task of surrendering the French army into the hands of the Germans.’

There was a murmur of deprecation.

‘I have,’ continued the General, ‘thought it right to accept this painful responsibility. Heaven knows, I would a thousand times sooner be struck by the same shell that has made the unlucky vacancy for me.’

‘No doubt, no doubt,’ was murmured by many voices.

‘But on consideration I feel that, as no friendly shell or bullet has done its work for me, I ought not assign the horrid—’ and here an actual shudder passed over the strong man’s frame—‘task to another.’

‘General Wimpffen,’ said a grave old officer, ‘believe me, your honourable motives are appreciated, and your country will do you justice.’

‘General,’ said a red-faced member of the council with a passionate, jerky manner, ‘it is impossible that the day shall not come when you will have an opportunity of vindicating yourself and showing what France can do against any foe when fairly matched.’

‘Gentlemen, I thank you. It is your unanim-

ous opinion that we should negotiate this surrender ?’

There was an all but universal assent.

A sharp voice however broke in. It was that of Brigadier Lambeau, ‘I am probably the youngest here, but I venture to dissent.’

‘And what course do you recommend ?’

‘Mine is hardly tactical,’ said Brigadier Lambeau. ‘I would concentrate as many troops as possible and break through this cordon. A fourth, a half, two-thirds may be lost in the attempt, but the honour of France will be saved.’

‘Regarding ourselves as part of the defences of the country,’ added an old General in support of the Brigadier, ‘it is the true tactique. Even if defeated it will be impossible the blow shall not cost the enemy dear. Whatever remnant escapes is good for ultimate defence ; but all who surrender, remember, are, so far as France is concerned, absolutely annihilated.’

There was a movement of hesitation in the council.

‘Gentlemen,’ said General Wimpffen, ‘my personal view coincides with those we have just heard, and I have endeavoured to urge the Emperor to its adoption. But he declines. It would be necessary for me, therefore, in order to do what is suggested, to fling off allegiance to his Majesty. That I am not prepared to do.’

A blank settled down on every countenance.

Thirty voices expressed their assent to General Wimpffen's proposition. Two were withheld.

'Gentlemen,' said General Wimpffen, 'the council is at an end. I go to put the sign-manual to my disgrace.'

Two hours after those who were at the village of Frenois were attracted by the sight of a civilian riding in company with a French General towards Sedan. He was enormously tall, and sat his horse with the air of a heavy dragoon. As he rode he conversed, and though his manner was not particularly animated it was earnest. His companion, though evidently of high military rank, and of the hostile nation, could not conceal some exhibition of that deference we pay often unconsciously to acknowledged power. The soldier was General Reilly, unluckily for him, Governor of Sedan; the civilian was Count Bismark.

'Do not apologize, General,' said the latter in tones which affected a certain heartiness; 'it is my duty to go and spare his Majesty all the trouble I can in this unpleasant juncture.'

'You are very good.'

'I see a carriage. That may be his Majesty's equipage.'

'Yes, I have no doubt it is.'

In a few moments after they met an open carriage driving rapidly towards them. It halted on their approach; within it were seated the Emperor and three generals. Three rode behind it,

and pulled up at the same moment as the carriage. Count Bismark, dismounting and holding his horse by the bridle, with his other hand took off his hat and bowed profoundly. The Emperor saluted the Count gravely, and his example was followed by the other inmates of the carriage. A footman opened the door, and the Emperor alighted. While he was so doing the great statesman held himself respectfully uncovered.

‘Pray be covered, Count,’ said the Emperor.

‘Sire, I receive your Majesty as I would my own royal Master.’

‘You are very good. I should be glad to see his Majesty the King of Prussia. Is he not at Donchery?’

‘No, Sire, he is at Vendresse.’

‘Why that is more than twenty kilometres distant,’ remarked the Emperor with an air of disappointment.

‘It is quite that, may it please your Majesty,’
• replied the Count.

‘Whither shall we go then?’

I know little of this part of the country, having arrived here last night in the dark, but the house I have occupied at Donchery is entirely at your Majesty’s disposal.’

‘That will do; let us go thither.’

So saying, the Emperor re-ascended into the carriage, and it drove on. As they were proceeding, he asked one of the Generals with him for a

light, and he smoked. As they approached within sight of Donchery, the Emperor, who had hitherto maintained his impassive calm, now seemed to grow somewhat uneasy.

‘Do you remember what I said to you,’ he asked the officer who sat next to him, ‘as we rode through Carignan?’

‘Your Majesty alluded to the probable conduct of the mob in case they had known we were defeated.’

‘Just so. Well, I fancy I should have some such reception here at Donchery.’

‘I should hope not.’

‘Ah, there is no use in hoping. M. le Comte,’ said he addressing Count Bismarck, ‘if you have no objection I would prefer to alight here.’

They were then within a hundred yards of the bridge which crossed the Meuse to Donchery.

‘I have no objection whatever, Sire,’ answered the Count, ‘save that there is no house in the least degree fit for your reception.’

A German General, who had joined the Count, was sent forward to inspect a workman’s house to which the Emperor had pointed, returned and said its accommodation was very poor and narrow, but free from wounded.

‘That suffices,’ said the Emperor. ‘Count, will you come with me?’

‘I am your Majesty’s very humble servant.’

They entered and went up the poor, creaking

stairs. A small room received them. Its only furniture was a table and two chairs. At the bidding of the Emperor the Count, who preserved a most ceremonious demeanour towards his captive, sat, while the Emperor himself occupied another. A long and earnest conversation ensued. An hour had passed, and the Emperor, whose face had assumed a wearied look, rose. The Count accepted the action as a hint that the interview had reached an end, and rose likewise.

‘Your Majesty then will not undertake to discuss the terms of peace?’ said the Count.

‘It would be out of the question. I have given full powers to the Regency, and it is only with them it can be discussed.’

‘I regret it, Sire.’

‘But surely, Count, you should not exact such crushing terms in the capitulation of the army.’

‘That, Sire, is a purely military question which must be settled between General Von Moltke and General Wimpffen.’

‘So much the worse, Count. Though you and I happen to be on the opposite sides now, I have always appreciated the personal friendliness of your disposition towards myself.’

‘I am proud of that, Sire.’

And so the interview ended.

As the door of the apartment closed upon the tall form of the Count, and the stair clattered

under his big person while he descended, his thoughts ran somewhat thus:—‘Four years have I been weaving my web for that stupid blue bottle; who could ever believe he would have so completely blundered into it?’

‘You have been a long time engaged with the Emperor,’ remarked the officer whom he had commissioned to inspect the apartment.

‘It is necessary to be circumspect even when you are dealing with a fool,’ was the reply, and they rode off.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ESCAPE.

‘**W**HAT noise is that?’ asked a sick man as he lay upon a narrow bed in a large house of the town of Sedan.

‘I shall inquire.’ And the surgeon, who was the only person at the moment in the room, left.

A heavy sigh was all that broke the stillness while the messenger was absent. In a few minutes the surgeon returned.

‘Marshal,’ he said, ‘you have borne with a fortitude I have rarely seen equalled the most terrible operation I have ever performed.’

‘What of that?’ said the Marshal impatiently. ‘Tell me the news for which I sent you.’

‘In the case of an ordinary patient I would endeavour to hide the knowledge, but you are so self-possessed——’

‘Man, speak out, if you do not want to give me the fever you are trying to stave off.’

‘Marshal, the noise means the arrival of the Prussians.’

‘I thought so,’ responded the wounded man with another sigh.

A gentle tap was heard at the door, followed by a head.

‘Marshil !’

A smile crossed the pain-worn face of the patient.

‘Marshal,’ said Mike Mahony eagerly, in a French which with difficulty was comprehensible to either of his hearers, but which was earnest enough, ‘there is a band of Germans before the door, and the officer—he’s a general I think—wants to come in and speak to you. There are only Michel and myself here, but, say the word, and not one of them will come in until he and I are done for anyway.’

‘No, no, good fellow,’ said the Marshal faintly. ‘We are all prisoners, alas ! Admit the German officer.’

Mike’s head was withdrawn with evident reluctance, and in a moment after a German officer entered the apartment.

‘I have the honour to speak to Marshal MacMahon ?’ said he in French.

‘Yes,’ replied the Marshal.

‘M. le Maréchal is aware that the French army has surrendered ?’

‘I am, and, of course, consider myself a prisoner.’

‘I am commissioned by his Most Gracious Majesty the King of Prussia to express his deep regret at the grievous wound which has been inflicted on M. le Maréchal.’

‘It is very condescending of his Majesty, and I beg to return my thanks.’

‘His most illustrious Majesty is anxious to make every arrangement which may conduce to the rapid cure of M. le Maréchal.’

‘I am grateful.’

‘With that view his Majesty has commissioned me to accept M. le Maréchal’s parole, and so leave him at complete liberty.’

‘His Majesty has acted like a courteous and generous enemy, but I cannot avail myself of his kindness. This wound of mine is, I dare say,’ he observed with a smile, ‘sufficient parole until it be cured. When it is cured I am determined to share the fate of my gallant army.’

‘But, M. le Maréchal,’ said the German with a tone of surprise, ‘that means that you will have to be interned in a German fortress.’

‘I do not regard it as a pleasure, Monsieur, believe me; but I cannot separate myself from the fortunes of the brave fellows I have commanded. They would if they could have carried me on to victory; as defeat has overtaken us, we shall share its penalties together.’

‘His most illustrious Majesty will, I am sure, hear your decision, M. le Maréchal, with regret. Permit me to add,’ continued the German, moved out of his phlegm, ‘that though an enemy I cannot wonder at the devotion with which your soldiers follow you.’

‘You are very kind, sir.’

‘I regret to say, M. le Maréchal,’ said the German, recovering his official manner, ‘that the soldiers whom I have seen on guard at your door must immediately march with the other prisoners.’

‘Poor fellows,’ said the Marshal with a sigh. ‘Of course it must be so. You have no objection to my seeing them once?’

‘None whatever.’

At a sign from his patient the surgeon summoned the comrades. Michel, with his grave face unaltered, betrayed little curiosity; Mike cast eager glances round, as if to learn whether there was anything to be done, or somebody to be fought, or if any insult was offered to his beloved chief.

‘My lads,’ said the Marshal with a faint voice, ‘we are all prisoners. You have to go to imprisonment. I shall soon follow you. But before you depart, I have wished to express my sense of your fidelity.’

The Marshal stretched out his hand. Michel stooped respectfully and kissed it. Mike knelt and did the same, with a burst of passionate lamentation.

‘Go, men,’ said the Marshal, ‘you have ceased to be under my control,’ and he fell back on his pillow exhausted.

‘It’s hard times with us, God knows,’ said Mike Mahony to himself, as he passed out of the

house and found himself amongst a batch of prisoners, 'but it's a great consolation anyhow to be in intimate inthercoorse with the head o' the famly.'

The march of the prisoners was through sights and scenes such as tended to distract the mind from the misery of their own lot in contemplating the frightful state of things around. They passed through the streets and out of the fortifications to a sort of island, formed by the cutting of a canal which joins, like the string of a bow, two parts of the serpentine Meuse. Their way lay for the most part over where some of the thickest of yesterday's fighting, or rather carnage, had been. By the side of the road were wounded men, whom the ambulances had not yet had time to collect. They were nearly all French, as the wounds had been caused by artillery, the battle being for the most part a battue. By the wounded lay the dead, too often envied by the almost dead who lay alongside them. Here and there a confused heap of red and blue rags, blood-stained and disfigured, alone represented what had once been soldiers. A few planks laid across the canal, the regular bridge of which had been broken down, formed the access to the island. Across this the prisoners were marched and turned loose like so many cattle in the field. For the first moment there was a sense of comparative liberty in this that was not without its charm, but it

very soon ceased. All round the outer banks were placed strong guards with loaded muskets, and behind them peeped the mouths of the cannon in great numbers. Had any combined attempt at escape been made it would have been possible to shoot down the whole sixty or seventy thousand prisoners without their being able to strike a blow in return. The German measures had been well taken.

As our two companions found themselves adrift in this miserable company, their ears were saluted with a uniform cry. It was 'Bread,' 'bread.'

'They have shut us up here to starve,' said one.

'Ay,' said another fiercely, 'it is part of the accursed compact between Napoleon and Bismarck that we, who have detected the treachery in this war, should be got rid of now by starvation.'

A German colonel appeared amongst them. Several of the prisoners stepped up to him and respectfully represented that they had had nothing to eat since the previous day.

'Ah, messieurs,' said he, 'that is not our fault. Let me read for you the order which has been made on this subject by our illustrious commander-in-chief.' And he took from his pocket a paper which he translated into French, saying it had been determined upon by the thereto undersigned that the French prisoners were to be fed with provisions which General Wimpffen had

promised should be sent from Mezieres to Donchery by rail.

‘But, Heavens, what are we to do while they are coming? Our commissariat has utterly broken down, as your commanders well enough know, monsieur. We had no provisions last night—most of us are twenty-four hours fasting, and are we to be left to this chance?’

The officer, who prided himself on a politeness perfectly French, said that ah, it was decidedly regrettable, but that he could not be held responsible for deficiencies in the arrangements of the French commanders.

‘Monsieur,’ said an old soldier, ‘as we were passing out of the town of Sedan this morning, I saw the Maire engaged in bringing up a mass of provisions. May they not have been for us?’

‘Oh, no. His Excellency, the commander-in-chief, decided on not having the town sacked, and confined himself to demanding the voluntary surrender of nearly everything in it.’

‘And those provisions were not for us?’

‘My good fellow, how could you dream of such a thing, and German soldiers requiring to be fed? Pray do not be absurd.’

‘But, M. l’officier, your commissariat, they say, is perfect, and your troops fully supplied.’

‘Of course, but the more we get out of your country, you know, the longer our commissariat will remain the perfect thing it is. But clear out

of the way there—I want you to get more evenly under the fire of those guns. It would not do,’ he added, with a coarse laugh, ‘to have you making an attempt at escape.’

‘You have taken very good care not to leave us the strength to attempt it, even if we had a chance,’ responded one of the men surlily, as they moved in the direction indicated. The officer only laughed again.

Michel and his companion were listeners, but not sharers in the dialogue. Both had unthinkingly followed the direction of the crowd, whose movement had brought them nearer to the bank of the river on the western side of the island. Michel sat down on a small mound, his head buried in his hands, and his mind sunk in gloomy memories and reflections. His comrade chatted with gay cheerfulness, attempting to lighten the load which lay on his friend’s spirits. Gradually he succeeded, so far that Michel became more attentive to the objects which surrounded them and to the nature of their position. Towards the afternoon a small consignment of bread arrived. It would not afford a loaf to every tenth man. The rush towards it was fearful to behold.

‘I hate to see people greedy for victuals,’ said Mike with philosophy. ‘I remember in the bad times, when things were very scanty amongst us, we had so small a share of potatoes and point that I often had to do with the point only.

And very well I done with it, too, glory be to God.'

'Nevertheless,' said Michel, 'you had better get a loaf.'

Mike looked at his companion with surprise. But a glance contented him.

'Oh, something up. All right; here goes.'

And marching over to the spot where a dense crowd were scrambling around a basket, he called out in a stentorian voice, 'De la viande! meat at last.'

'Where, where?' cried out a hundred voices.

'That's exactly what I want to know,' said Mike coolly, as, profiting by the interruption, he slipped his hand into the basket, took out a loaf, and walked over to his companion.

It was almost an even chance whether there was a laugh or a dangerous ebullition of rage at Mike's trick; but hunger overcame both, and the crowd turned its attention to the basket.

The comrades sat as before by the river bank. Its waters were a floating grave. Drowned men went by, their ghastly faces showing white and terrible above the water; slain men, whose bodies had tumbled in, dyed the stream with their blood. But the most fearful sight was the horses. They were in all stages of mortality. Dead, choking up the shallower parts with their carcases; dying, and going struggling down the stream; wounded, and screaming and whinnying, as they vainly

strove to get a footing on the steep banks. Already the stench of their decay rose up, to add a new abomination to all the rest under which the wretched prisoners suffered.

'Mike,' said Michel, 'we ought be able to get out of this.'

'Swim it, do you mean?'

'No. With all these horses it would be impossible.'

'How then?'

'Ride it.'

'Be easy now.'

'Why not? Numbers of these horses are strong enough to carry us across. They are knocking about in such profusion that they are not noticed, and we would have more chance of being unobserved on one of them than while swimming ourselves.'

'Well, it's only trying. Anyhow it's as good sinking there, or being shot on the way over, as starving here, or spending one's holidays in a German prison.'

The night fell gloomily upon the miserable crowd, deficient in food or shelter, and most of them without even their watch coats. Our friends, however, were too much occupied in the furtherance of their own plan to dwell much on the misfortunes of their companions. As its working depended so much on chance they had to make their minds up to separate action, but while day-

light lasted they fixed a point on the opposite bank which if all things went well should be their rendezvous.

‘I’ll try first,’ said Mike; ‘if anything happens to me, I’m no great loss.’

‘That must not be,’ said Michel firmly, ‘it is my plan, and the first right to test it is mine.’

‘Well, I can’t deny it. Here’s the loaf then; keep a bit for me when I get to the other side.’

‘No, I do not require it, and I understand the country better than you do.’

‘Michel, my boy, you’re a—well, you’re a brick. Here, the thing to be done is half apiece.’ So saying he broke the small loaf which he divided with his companion.

‘Now,’ said Michel, ‘do not start at the soonest for ten minutes after I have parted. If at that time you hear no shot fired, calculate that I am over, or——’

‘All right, all right,’ said Mike with swelling in his throat. ‘Good-bye, God send you safe over.’

Michel crept cautiously along the bank until he came to a steep spot which cast a heavy shadow. Watching anxiously, Mike after a little time heard a splash which he concluded to be the plunge of his friend. Then with beating heart he listened for the sounds of shots, but none came. Quarter of an hour had elapsed, when he thought he too ought to attempt the stream. Following to the spot whence Michel had departed he found that a por-

tion of the stream was so shallow that he could wade to some fourteen or fifteen yards from the shore. There were horses enough near him ; some lay dead in the shoal water, portions of their carcases appearing above the surface, but no live horse was near. Mike surveyed the river, which was from three to four hundred yards wide, with a strong stream running. He entertained great doubts as to whether he could accomplish the distance, exhausted as he was by hunger and want of rest.

‘Never mind,’ said he to himself at last, ‘if we can’t ride we’ll have a bath,’ and he plunged softly into the flood. For a minute or so he struck out strongly, but his weakened condition told sorely against him. With each succeeding stroke he felt the pain of his arms grow more distinct, and the weight of his garments more telling.

‘No shot yet, any how,’ he said to himself as he toiled on. ‘I wonder would it do to try a float to rest myself.’

As the thought crossed his mind he saw swimming down the current an object that even in the dim light he could ascertain to be a horse. The poor creature was labouring heavily, evidently wounded. Mike saw at a glance that any hope of riding across the rolling river on this animal was out of the question, but he did not despair. The bridle hung over the horse’s neck, and with his failing strength he grasped it. The shock startled

the already bewildered beast, and he kicked and plunged with fury, but Mike, keeping clear of his hoofs, by even the grasp he had on the rein was enabled to buoy himself up, while at the same time he contrived to turn the horse's head across the stream. Then cautiously catching the saddle, which was still on the back of the animal, he found sufficient support to make little demand on his own exertions. But the help soon threatened to abandon him. The wounded beast had nearly spent his forces. Heavier and heavier grew his exertions, until, as they neared the opposite bank, with a snort he threw up his head, and sank in the deep water. Mike was plunged likewise under the surface, but the comparative rest had somewhat restored his strength, and the nearness of the shore acted on him like the stimulus of wine. Striking out with a last spasm of strength he all but grasped the bank, when once again the water closed over him. A strong hand, however, grasped his collar as he disappeared under the surface, and a deep voice whispered in his ear, 'You are safe.'

'Too much water was the objection Jimmy the Inkbottles always made to his grog,' said Mike Mahony five minutes after, 'and I, his favourite pupil, was very near being spoiled by the same defect.'

CHAPTER VII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

ON a hot and dusty day in September, when shade seemed more precious even than food, two women stood in the shelter of a small wood. One of them bore the full habit of the order of charity; the other was simply arrayed in sober black, with the exception of a white band on her arm, bearing the Geneva cross. The countenance of the nun was striking. Without being absolutely beautiful it had that clearness of tint and that serenity of expression which convent life seems to impart, and which are the nearest approach to perpetual youth that the world knows. Her companion we need not describe; it was Annette Beaune.

The wood by the skirt of which they stood was isolated, but was itself of considerable dimensions, and partly surrounded the village of Brevane in the valley of the Marne. It was some nine miles from Paris, but from a neighbouring height, that of Mont Meli, the dome of the Invalides, the towers of Notre Dame, and other elevated points of the great city were visible.

‘Are you impatient to see Paris?’ asked the nun; ‘young people like you are always anxious to behold the big, wonderful place.’

When she spoke of ‘young people’ one would be apt to suppose that she merely adopted the tone of seniority towards Annette from the dignity of her position and the gravity of her pursuits. But in truth she was half again as old as the girl alongside her.

‘Sister, I am, I confess, impatient to see Paris, but not because it is great or gay. Indeed, indeed, I have little heart for gaiety.’

‘But you think it is likely your fiancé may be found there?’

‘I know not, I am sure. When the troops are defeated everywhere else, it is likely they will go thither. Perhaps not. But trust me, sister, I will not allow any thought of him to interfere with the proper discharge of such duties as you may put me to.’

‘I hope not; indeed I believe from what sister Teresa writes to me that it will not. Remember, child, that you must not set earthly affections higher than your love for God or your resolution to work His commands.’

‘I will endeavour to act up to what you tell me,’ was Annette’s meek response.

‘But come, our voiture—if I may so call it, ought to be round by this, and there is a good distance yet from the city.’

As she spoke they moved towards the edge of the wood, and saw through the trees a poor conveyance drawn by a miserable-looking, jaded animal. The man in charge was a peasant of advanced age, in a blouse and gaiters, and armed with a carter's whip. He touched his round hat as the women appeared, and assisted them into the vehicle.

'I do not know how to thank you, monsieur, for your kindness in bringing us so far. But God will reward your charity.'

'Madame, I cannot do much for my poor country, and it is a little thing to bring a few leagues on their way ladies who will tend our brave fellows when wounded.'

'Ah,' exclaimed Annette, who could hardly suppress a little shriek, as they were interrupted by a loud report, a crashing in the branches of the trees, and an explosion in the dull earth. 'What is that?'

'What is that?' repeated the peasant, while the nun smiled.

'Yes, do tell me.'

'What is that, you want to know. Well, in my opinion,' said he slowly, 'that is——'

'What, what? Pray tell me, monsieur.'

'Eh bien; if I am not greatly mistaken, and I am now sixty-five years old, and have seen something of the world, ay, and remember the entrance of the allied armies into France, and have read the journals since, that is——'

‘It is?’

‘That is the first shot of the siege of Paris.’

The women turned pale. Even the nun, accustomed as she was to war, and trained to hold mere personal peril cheap as compared with duty, felt a shock while the terrible idea and all its train of possible consequences flashed across her mind. Annette experienced a sickly sensation as if she were going to faint.

‘Come, petite,’ said sister Agnes kindly, ‘the first thing you have to learn in your new occupation is to banish fear.’

‘Oh, trust me, sister, I shall not be troublesome to you after a little while. But I was unprepared, you understand.’

‘I understand it well enough, child. I shall never forget the first time I saw a battle. The noise and the smoke and the tearing hither and thither threw me into such a confusion of mind that I scarce knew what I was doing. And though long accustomed to the sights of a large hospital, there was something that almost overpowered me in the vast mass of wounds and suffering that presented itself to my eyes.’

A shudder passed through the frame of Annette at the picture which this statement conjured up.

‘But it is marvellous how soon one grows familiar with these horrors, and able to look on them with calmness.’

‘And are you not afraid of the terrible artillery fire, like that we have just seen?’

The nun laughed gently. ‘When first I heard it I had some difficulty in suppressing a shriek, just like you, petite; but now it comes quite easy to commit myself to the protection of the good God and of His dear Mother, and to feel then no more care about the peril to my own safety than if my body belonged to some one else.’

‘Ah,’ said Annette, ‘that is glorious courage.’

‘No, no, dear child, it is not courage at all; it is only faith. I am not the least a heroine. I remember when I was a grown-up girl I would all but faint at the sight of blood, and cry out with fear if I saw a rat.’

‘And you are so brave now,’ said Annette admiringly.

‘Not a bit brave, only trustful. I put myself unreservedly into the hands of my Maker to be disposed of as it shall please Him. You, child, will do the same, I have no doubt, and then fear will be cast from you.’

As they spoke a loud artillery fire burst out, but no new shell came near them. Then the rattle of musketry came up the valley, and other sounds which indicated that the scene of strife was not far off. They stood uncertain what course they should take, when along the road they saw approaching a litter covered with white, and over it a small flag bearing on it a red cross.

'Ah,' exclaimed the nun, 'I now know well enough what we have to do. Thanks, monsieur,' said she, turning to the peasant, 'we shall not need your services longer. I fear our duty has begun already, for yonder evidently are wounded, and it is but too probable there may be many more. For your charitable aid to us count on a higher reward than any we can offer you, but be sure of our prayers.'

'Sister,' said the old man, 'I will go readily with you to Paris.'

'No, no. We shall probably be wanted here; if not, we can now make our way on foot, owing to your kindness.'

'Well, then, madame, adieu. Adieu, petite.'

As the old peasant departed, the ambulance they had seen down the road approached them slowly, but before it reached the spot where they were standing, another was seen coming in the same direction, and then another.

'Here is an opportunity, sooner than you expected, to commence your work,' said the nun quietly to Annette.

Annette felt a complete sinking of the heart, but with an internal ejaculation, in the spirit the Sister of Charity had enjoined, she endeavoured to brace up her nerves to the task which lay before her. The first ambulance was brought to a halt within a few yards of where they stood, and a conference seemed to be proceeding amongst the guides.

'We must be out of range here,' said one, checking the horse.

'Ah, I do not know,' said another; 'these German bullets travel far.'

The women heard the altercation, and Sister Agnes coming forward stated that a shot had already struck the wood which bordered the road. Presently, a horseman rode up, who was seen to be a surgeon, and on the statement of Sister Agnes being conveyed to him, he directed the ambulance to be moved on higher. While they were talking Annette had glanced into the wagon, and the sight she there encountered shook, though but for a moment, the resolution she had formed to devote herself to the aid of the wounded. Already she had encountered and tended one victim of the war, but his condition had before been partially assuaged, and though pitiable was not terrible. Now she had to behold the laceration of the human frame in all its raw reality. Hasty bandages seemed only to render the blood that oozed through them more startlingly palpable; the torn stump appeared to her to stare through the rough linen; the cadaverous face preserved expression enough to be more terrible than death. There were groans, but neither so loud nor so numerous as she anticipated; but there was worse in the quiver of the whole body, when the slightest motion of the rough vehicle sent a thrill through the wretch's every nerve. This manifestation, which patience could not

prevent nor fortitude conceal, sent an answering vibration through Annette's own frame. As she looked into the waggon some heavy eyes, whitening as if in the agony of dissolution, were turned slowly towards her. It was with absolute pleasure she heard the murmur 'water' from several lips. It gave her at once an occupation. A rough tin vessel hung beside the cart. She snatched it down and hastily plunged into the wood where she remembered the flowing of a bright little stream at which half-an-hour before she and her companion had quenched their thirst.

'Who is that?' questioned the doctor.

'A hospital assistant whom I am taking with me to Paris.'

'She is very young.'

'Yes, but she is spirited and intelligent, and will become a useful nurse.'

'Ha, there is something which confirms your statement about this spot being within range.'

A shell burst into the wood, not very far from where they were speaking. A tree-splinter was flung upon the doctor's coat. He brushed it coolly off with his handkerchief. It struck a branch that overhung the little spring towards which Annette's steps were bent, but it did not check her speed for a moment, and she went on and filled the vessel as if nothing had happened.

'You are right,' said the doctor, 'that girl will do.'

The ambulance moved slowly up the hill, but

Annette soon overtook it. As she went with the vessel in her hand towards the waggon the doctor said with a smile :—‘Petite, you are acting without orders.’

Annette blushed and looked dismayed.

‘Never mind, child, you cannot do much harm as long as you confine yourself to a drink of water. But, remember, the first business of a nurse is to carry out the views of the doctor.’

‘I shall remember it, monsieur.’ And Annette, availing herself of the permission accorded, ran hastily with her can. The sufferers drank greedily; all but one who lay in a corner of the ambulance without motion, and only gave sign of life now and then by a feeble moan. While thus engaged Annette all but forgot her previous shrinking from the horrors in which she was placed.

‘I perceive,’ said Sister Agnes, when the task was accomplished and they were walking alongside the ambulance, ‘that you have been already engaged in your duty.’

‘It is so little I could do,’ sighed Annette.

‘You appear to have got over your fear of the wounded very quickly,’ remarked the nun.

‘I felt a dreadful disposition at first to run away, but when I came back with the water I almost forgot my terror.’

‘My child, you have found the exact way to get rid of the sense of repugnance that one feels at the sight of misery. Begin to help and your

loathing soon vanishes. Did you give water to all?’

‘There is one man who seems quite insensible and did not lift his head while I was giving it round.’

‘Ah,’ said the doctor, who rode by their side, ‘that fellow in the corner has had a severe internal hurt. The wheel of an artillery waggon passed over him. It is a stimulant he wants. Here,’ and he called one of the guides; ‘some brandy.’

The guide produced a flask from which the doctor poured a quantity into a glass.

‘Here,’ he said to Annette, ‘complete your round of the patients by administering this. And keep the flask by you.’

Annette went at once as directed. She had a difficulty in performing her task as the man lay on his side, and with his face inclined downwards. In the attitude in which he was, it was impossible to get him to drink, so she dipped her finger in the glass and applied it two or three times to his lips. On the third application the stimulant had the effect of causing a slight movement, and he turned so far that she was able to put the vessel to the mouth. Carefully dropping it between his lips, the effects soon became visible in the increasing sensibility of the patient. At last he slowly opened his eyes and stared heavily at her. Annette had up to this been so absorbed in the

excitement of her new duty and the gravity of her task, that she had never dreamed of considering the individuality of the patient. But now, as his dark eyes glared on her from the corner of the ambulance, she recognized him and trembled.

It was Marc Rapp.

CHAPTER VIII.

PASSING UNCONSCIOUS.

THE shock Annette received on thus encountering a man who had caused so much pain and unhappiness to herself, and so much peril to one she loved, was very severe. She recoiled from his sight as if she had suddenly encountered a poisonous reptile. Yet she had no reason to fear. The man lay powerless—indebted to her for such slight restoration of his strength as enabled him even to open his eyes. Did he recognize her? was the first question that she tremblingly asked herself. She could not say. The dark eyes had once more closed, the lids falling heavily upon them, and the man almost relapsed into his unconscious state. While Annette was engaged in her mission she had not been unobserved. The Sister of Charity, who had taken a deep interest in her youth and her high-hearted resolution, was curious to note how she demeaned herself in her first essay upon those whose care she proposed to undertake. Pleased with the self-forgetfulness Annette had first shown, she watched her attendance on the wounded men, and saw the start and

the visible emotion she manifested in dealing with one of the patients.

‘Qu’ avez vous, petite ?’ she cried with surprise, as she walked over to where Annette was standing, bewildered and confused. ‘You are not beginning to be afraid of these poor wounded men ?’

‘No,’ answered Annette slowly, ‘I am not afraid—I think I am not.’

‘Think, petite ! What is there to think about ? These wounds are dreadful to look at, but they *must* be nursed and tended, and in the care of them you will soon forget the repugnance they inspire.’

‘Oh, Sister, I thoroughly understand that now. When I was giving water to the men, I felt no shrinking from their dreadful gashes. It is the man yonder, who has no gash at all, that frightens me.’

‘What has he done ?’

‘I see in him my dreadful enemy.’

‘You, child, so young, to have an enemy ?’

Annette related in a few brief, intelligent sentences, the story of her knowledge of Marc Rapp.

‘Ah, it is terrible,’ said the Sister of Charity, ‘that men should abandon themselves so to wickedness. But now, petite, there is the enemy before whom you trembled, by the mysterious hand of Providence laid helpless, as it were, at

your feet, and craving your aid to restore him to life and strength. What is your impulse to do?’

‘To endeavour to forget the past and devote myself to his restoration.’

‘Right, Child. There spoke the language of a Christian. Even if thereby you only raise your enemy up again to persecute you, have no fear—God will be your protector.’

While this dialogue was passing the ambulances had been moving, their numbers increasing considerably. The first doctor was joined by a second, and when a spot had been reached that was considered to be out of any probable range, an extempore hospital was devised to enable the surgeons to perform the most pressing operations. The Sister of Charity lent her help to the medical men, as coolly as they themselves exercised their skill; Annette was hastily called into requisition, and all of a sudden compelled to act independently as an assistant.

‘Here, nurse,’ said the latest arrived surgeon, a bluff, middle-aged man.

Annette ran hastily to him, supposing that she was needed to fetch water, or to prepare a bandage, or to perform some other trifling service suitable to her inexperience. Like all useful women, she was prepared with her needle and thread, and ready to do any amount of stitching that might be demanded of her. To her astonishment she observed the professional gentleman taking out

what seemed his needle and thread, and preparing it in the most workman-like manner. It was in fact the curved instrument with the coil of silver suture used for the closing of wounds.

‘Take that man’s head firmly in your hands, and do not let it stir,’ said he, pointing to one of the patients lying before him.

Annette turned pale with horror. ‘That man,’ said she faintly.

The surgeon, who had scarcely looked at her before, so busy was he with his preparations, now turned his eyes on her.

‘What on earth business have they sending demoiselles like you to pretend to be nurses?’ he said roughly.

‘Forgive me, monsieur,’ said Annette humbly, ‘but I have only come to do my best, and I have no experience as yet. If you bear with me I will do what you direct as well as I can.’

‘Well,’ he said more softly, and glancing down at the patient, ‘it is rather an ugly commencement if this is your first case.’

The patient was lying stretched upon the grass with no support beneath his head. The flesh of his cheek seemed to be nearly torn away by the jagged fragment of a shell, and hung in loose, disjointed pieces. As Annette fixed her eyes upon the hideous, gaping wound, she felt her limbs totter and her head reel. But animated with a sense of duty, and spurred perhaps by the rough

tongue of the surgeon, she mustered all her courage and prepared unshrinkingly to carry out the doctor's instructions. She placed her cool hands upon the poor lacerated head, and the soft touch seemed to bring some alleviation to the agony which pervaded the exposed and battered nerves. Presently, the horror of her situation became absorbed in the interest of the proceeding at which she assisted. There was a certain fascination in watching the motions of the rough doctor, as his strong hands with their coarse fingers plied the instrument more delicate than would be employed in a lady's boudoir. With surprising swiftness and dexterity, the jagged parts were carefully brought into their places, and each secured with one or two movements of the needle. It was a task requiring the utmost nicety, and on which the most patient attention was bestowed, yet hardly a quarter of an hour had elapsed when a complete transformation had taken place in the aspect of the patient. The face that had seemed a confused mass of raw flesh was now restored to its original shape, swollen and inflamed-looking indeed, but still not much removed from the ordinary outline of humanity.

'Can you manage to make a bandage?' asked the doctor, as he was giving the last touches to his work.

'Oh, yes, if you tell me the shape.'

'Tell you the shape? Ha, I see you have some

sense, and don't imagine that one bandage is as good as another, as some of the fools they send us here seem to think.'

Following clear and explicit directions, Annette had the bandage ready when the doctor was prepared to use it.

'Shall I put it on, monsieur?'

'Now, you little goose, I retract the praise I gave you for sense. Do you not know that a bandage is as important a part of a surgeon's art as the knife or the lancet? And do you think you could at your first essay make the case for what I must call this really artistic piece of work of mine?'

Never resting for a second while he spoke, he had the bandage in a few seconds secured around the head of the patient.

'Are you wise enough to have some brandy with you?'

Annette was in possession of the flask she had been entrusted with for Mark Rapp.

'Here is some.'

'You improve on acquaintance. Now give that to the patient, and then we are done with him for the present. But, observe, his case is a very critical one. Nerves aren't shattered as his have been without serious peril. Keep your eye particularly on that patient. Don't let him faint if you can help it. You ought to have sense enough to be able to employ a stimulant with moderation

and judgment. I should particularly like to keep him alive, because, I think, considering the circumstances, the haste and the sort of assistance I have had—' poor Annette winced—'it is an achievement to do me credit.'

'I will watch him carefully, monsieur.'

'And now, come, there is abundance of work for us. I will make you a nurse before we have quitted this piece of ground.'

For two hours Annette attended closely to the bidding of her rough but skilful guide. She was compelled to tasks that at one time merely to hear of would have filled her with loathing. She found herself face to face with realities of which she had never dreamed, when she first conceived the idea of undertaking the duties of a nurse. But the very crowding together of horrors helped in some degree to deaden their effect. She performed the task assigned to her in a state of excitement analogous to that which carries a nervous soldier bravely through a battle. When that period was past she had achieved the most important stage of her apprenticeship.

But now a new change of position was necessitated. It was no longer ambulances only that came past, but troops; and the bugles were heard sounding the retreat. First came dropping irregularly men in twos and threes, then in larger bodies, and finally columns of companies. Behind them were artillery, and lastly cavalry.

Scattered amongst the latter were a number of irregular skirmishers, who aided to cover the retreat, a task of little difficulty, as there was no ardour of pursuit. Though the German force was strong enough to have swallowed up the feeble French corps—or rather remnant of a corps—that had made the attack, it was not part of the Prussian policy just now to press too close to the city. They were merely on the look-out for ground for investment, and they had found it.

‘They are not coming farther, I think,’ said Mike Mahony to his companion.

‘No, apparently they do not wish to press on too far.’

‘Isn’t it a murder that we haven’t, just for once, something like a fair match with them?’

‘It is a pity, but we are not ourselves free from blame.’

‘I suppose that’s not Count Bismarck over there on the yellow horse?’

‘It is very improbable: how do you know the horse is yellow?’

‘What do I care whether it is or not? But I’m sorry that’s not the Count.’

‘Why so?’

‘Because I’m going to get rid of him, and a blessed riddance the world will have.’

‘It is more than thirteen hundred metres.’

‘Well, sure if I miss him it’s only a bullet lost. By the hokey it’s the yellow horse I’ve hit. Try you.’

‘It is a great shot, Mike, to have even hit the horse at the distance. I shall try as you wish it. But it is all but useless Parbleu—hit the horse again.’

‘Well, you see that animal has his horse balls made up for him without a vet. But I’d rather have hit the rider than the innocent beast. My only hope is that with his rearing he may break his rider’s neck, and that the neck broken may be Count Bismarck’s.’

‘Psha, Mike. You don’t think men like Bismarck who set the world by the ears go where they may meet stray bullets. No, they put in the way of them fools like you and me, and these wretched German soldiers over there.’

‘Phew,’ said Mike with a whistle, ‘are you coming out as a politician?’

‘No,’ responded Michel abruptly, ‘my duty is to fight as a soldier, and not discuss state matters. Allons—there is the bugle sounding.’

‘Well, of course, it is our duty to retreat when the bugle sounds retreat, but ’pon my soul, with the delicate ear for music that I’ve got, I begin to hate that tune, I hear it so very often. No letter or sign of a letter from home, I suppose?’

‘No,’ responded Michel gloomily. ‘It is dreadful to think of. What will become of Annette? What does she think of me? Does she suppose me false or dead? I would rather she mourned

for me as a corpse than believe I could forget her, dear girl.'

'I never had the satisfaction of seeing Miss Annette, Michel, though I hope to try a real Irish jig at her wedding one of these days; but I am quite sure from what you tell me that she is too honest-hearted herself to believe you false, and too brave to mope and moon, and fancy the worst.'

'I am quite sure you are right, but I am myself so foolish that I am ever imagining new sorrows and new dangers for her.'

'From that scoundrel, Rapp, for instance?'

'Ay,' said Michel with a stern expression.

'Do you know, Michel, I'd give a few months' pay to be alone in a room with that fellow, and ne'er a weapon in the hands of either of us.'

'Don't, for God's sake, Mike. My heart grows wild with hatred and thirst of vengeance when I think of him, and I am scarcely able to demean myself like a sober man.'

'Indeed, then, I will not mention his ugly name again. It was like my stupidity to be bringing him into the conversation. It is a deal better to be talking of that beautiful brave girl, who loves you so dearly, and who, trust me, Michel, will one day, when these cruel battles are at an end, be Madame Voss. But who are these women over there?'

Michel looked and saw the ambulances. They were about a furlong distant. Two female figures

in black were seen flitting from litter to litter in assiduous devotion to the wounded.

‘They are sœurs de la charité, no doubt,’ he answered. ‘They are in attendance on the wounded.’

‘Ah, the darling creatures,’ said Mike. ‘If they don’t walk straight into heaven. — But I wonder now could they, by any possibility, ever be in the same place with that villain Rapp.’

‘Mike——’

‘Ah, I know. Excuse me, Michel,’ said Mike hastily; and then in the tone of self-commune in which he occasionally indulged, he observed, ‘Mr Michael Mahony, you are what I call a poorty fellow to be naming, in the same breath, them two heavenly craytures over there, and that double-dyed blaguard, Rapp, as if anything could bring them together in the next world, or in this, for that matter.’

And so Michel and Mike on their retreat towards Paris passed the ambulances where Annette was receiving her first lesson as an attendant on the wounded.

CHAPTER IX.

DIPLOMACY.

PARIS was invested. The iron circle of the German thousands had gathered round it, and was closing in slowly but steadily every day. Men could hardly believe it, but there the dreadful fact was. It caused, however, vexation or anger, rather than any gloomy apprehension. The courageous, sanguine, light-hearted Parisian would not entertain the notion that there could be any end of a disastrous character. When the mobiles were trained they would go out and defeat the Prussians and raise the siege; or armies from the South and North, or from the East and West—somewhere—would come up and assail the besiegers in the rear. At all events, there was no idleness. Under the active superintendence of General Trochu, magazines were being organized and the city divided: the mobiles were drilling, able-bodied men were perpetually engaged in the construction of the forts, and every effort was made to provide as effective a resistance as possible. The fair Lutetia, spoiled votary of pleasure as she was, put on the arms of Pallas with courage

if not with the skill of constant practice, and, as readily as ever she went to a scene of revelry, prepared to take her share of the changing blows.

Michel Voss and his faithful companion were stationed at the fortress of Vincennes, with a portion of Vinoy's corps to which they had been attached after the capture of their own at Sedan. Michel was not naturally a reserved man. On the contrary, his spirit was originally bright and cheerful, but the troubles of his career weighed on his soul, and he became taciturn and thoughtful. Had it rested with him, little would have been known of the adventures through which he passed ; but Monsieur Mahony had no such reticence. Already he considered that he had acquired the true narrative style in French, and in the intervals of guard mounting and such occupations, his mouth adorned with eloquence and the shortest of short pipes, he would expatiate to his comrades on the prowess, courage, and readiness of his friend. As a rule Michel was generally absent when his praises were thus vigorously sounded, for he had grown much into the habit of indulging his solitary thoughts. When, however, he happened to be present, he invariably, and almost angrily, put aside the prominence assigned to himself, declaring that his friend the Irlandais was as good a shot as he, and that no man in the French army was braver. And so it came about that the comrades were a good deal spoken of, and from the peculiar

nature of his exploits, Michel began to be known as the Franc-Tireur.

‘Of what are you thinking, Michel?’ said Mike to his comrade one afternoon, as the former leaned upon a parapet of the fortification, his chin upon his hand, gazing as it seemed vacantly into the distance. ‘I suppose it’s the old story—the father—the pretty spouse—the——’

‘No, no, it is not that,’ said Michel with unusual animation. ‘Heaven knows they are seldom out of my thoughts——’

‘So much the worse. Look here, Michel, I have bitter things to think of, too, though I own not so bad as you have to trouble you; but it is hard to be banished from your country by the meanness of a ruffian, to have left a poor old father and mother that you don’t know what has become of, and—and—ay, Michel, a girl that I would jump down that wall there and break my neck to get a look at this blessed moment.’

Michel smiled at the exaggeration despite the gravity of his thoughts, and Mike in a slight confusion said, ‘never mind if I talk a little strong, but I am in earnest. I would go through fire and water for that girl, and yet——’

‘Mike,’ said Michel kindly, ‘do not for a moment doubt that I understand your nature, and know that there is depth of feeling under the gaiety of your manner. It is very good of you to try to console me, but *en verité* I was not dwell-

ing on the things from which you want to distract me.'

'Then there's a beautiful piece of rethoric gone for nothing,' muttered Mike to himself.

'My mind was filled at the time with thoughts of quite a different kind.'

'So much the better. Can you tell me what they are?'

'Look out there.'

Mike followed the direction in which his comrade pointed. It was away over the wood. He saw the village of Nogent with its little red and white habitations buried in the foliage and embalmed in the odour of gardens. Its great viaduct, like a piece of lace-work, stretched across the broad river, the arches decreasing until they got lost in the line of railway that, like a thread, might be seen winding its way through the distant country. At the other-side of the river were great farms and villages so bright that they seemed to laugh in the sunshine, and steeples that rose directly out of trees like an abnormal growth of the pleasant woods.

'Well,' said Mike, after a long gaze, 'I'm looking, but what I'm looking at it would be very hard for me to tell. The place reminds me of old Ireland—'

'Of old Ireland,' said Michel with surprise. 'Is Ireland as rich-looking and populous as that? Why even to me who am a Frenchman this luxury

of growth and density of population seem a wonder.'

'That's just it. It reminds me of Ireland, you see, because its so very unlike it.'

'Oh!' said Michel.

'You don't understand, I know.'

'Not quite.'

'Well, you see what I mean is that if we were rich enough in Ireland to have very big cities, and to have pretty villages round them all filled in with beautiful trees, Ireland would be very like that.'

'Ah, I perceive; I did not at first.'

'No wonder you didn't,' said Mike with a laugh, 'for may I never see a drop of Jameson again if I very well know what I meant myself.'

'Well, it was not for comparisons I asked you to look, but for something else. Do you see any sign of the Germans there in all that space?'

'The devil a sign.'

'And yet we all know they are working with their infernal industry, almost within range of the guns of this fort, at traverses, approaches, batteries, and other things, that before long will be used against us.'

'It would be just like them, the mean curs, trying to worm their footing into a place where they know the owner is disposed to kick them out.'

'But what is more—you see that village?'

'I do.'

‘Well, they are constantly reconnoitring, while we are not. They have always watchers pushed on before their working parties, and they are left to come and go freely. Last night I heard they were through that village there.’

‘Hadn’t we better invite the gentlemen into the fort here, as they are at the trouble of coming so far?’ asked Monsieur Mahony in his most sarcastic tones.

‘No, but I think, ami, if you and I had our way we would make their visit a little less agreeable to them, and induce them to keep somewhat farther off in future.’

Mike’s eyes sparkled. ‘At the old tricks again, Michel! Ah, I see; sorrow has not taken the pluck out of you anyway.’

‘Why should it? I have less to live for than ever. But it is much harder to execute an idea than to conceive it. We are not now under our poor brave friend the Brigadier, who so loved to see a dashing thing done.’

‘God be with him wherever he is,’ said Mike.

‘I am afraid our officers here will not care to let us try.’

‘Not care! If they don’t I’ll desert, and constitute myself the army of all the points of the compass, with General Mahony as commander-in-chief.’

‘Bah, this is not an affair of one or two men. We should have a dozen or twenty. These Ger-

mans ride in big parties, and it would require a considerable force to teach them an adequate lesson.'

'Well, there's nothing like trying. That Captain Tournay might take an interest in the thing and talk over the others.'

'Why do you think he would?'

'Well, I don't exactly know except that he has a red nose.'

'A red nose! What has that to do with it?'

'Well, you see red-nosed men are generally near their passion, and I think if you put neatly to him the blackguard impudence of these Germans in riding through the village, he might be got into a tearing rage.'

'There is something in that,' remarked Michel; 'let us come to him.'

They proceeded across the flagged promenade, and went towards the officers' quarters. The captain was at the moment enjoying relief from the heat of the day, and the fatigue of drill and superintendence of works, by a brief siesta in his arm-chair. Receiving no response to their knock, the two men pushed in the door of the apartment, and beheld the officer in a very loose deshabelle, with all the placidity of slumber spread over his countenance.

'He'll be in a tearing rage, sure enough,' said Mike, 'but I'm afraid it's not with the Germans.'

'It cannot be helped. We will not go back

now.' And Michel, in a strong voice said, 'Monsieur le capitaine.'

'What the devil is this about?' cried the captain opening his eyes, with no sweet expression of countenance.

'I crave your pardon very humbly, captain, but I have come to ask a favour from you, and it is one of rather an urgent nature.'

'What is it?' was the gruff and unpromising inquiry.

'My comrade and I have been accustomed to act as sharp-shooters, and we are anxious to be so employed again.'

'And what is that to me? Go, shoot away and be hanged to you.'

'But we had a particular project in contemplation which needs more help than our own two arms. The village of Nogent is nightly patrolled by a large German force——'

'Oh, ho! And you want to be made a brigadier-general, and sent to fight a battle there?'

'No, monsieur le capitaine. I have no notion of going beyond my humble grade. All I would ask is from a dozen to twenty men.'

'And what would you do with them?'

'Well, I think I can promise, monsieur, that a good many of those who went into the village would never leave it.'

'I think, my friend, you had better content yourself with executing your orders.'

Michel was prepared for a refusal, but he could scarcely repress a sigh as he turned away.

‘Good-bye, captain,’ said Mike as he affected to depart with his friend, ‘I’m told them Germans are to have a grand spree at Nogent to-night.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I believe they’ve ordered supper at the hotel to commemorate the investment of Paris.’

‘Who told you that?’

‘Why then, captain, it would be hard to say exactly. These things come to you in a sort of a way that you can’t—you know—exactly as I might——’

‘That is true—that is true,’ said the captain excitedly. ‘A supper you say—and to celebrate the investment of the city?’

‘So I believe, captain,’ said Mike with astounding gravity.

‘Ay, and the scoundrels, I suppose, in their drunken bouts will be declaring that the French were afraid to molest them,’ continued the captain with still rising excitement.

‘It’s just what the ruffians would do, I’m sure, your Honour,’ answered Mike with the faintest twinkle in the corner of his eye.

‘Tonnerre,’ growled the captain, assuming a thoughtful expression.

‘It’s to-night, I believe, captain,’ said Mike, diligently fanning the flame he had kindled,

‘they’re to have it. The best of everything, I’m told.’

‘How many men did you say you’d want?’ said the captain turning to Michel.

‘Any number from twelve to twenty.’

‘By Heaven you shall have them, if Adrien Tournay’s long services count for anything with the commandant. Meet me in half-an-hour at head-quarters.’

‘Mike,’ said Michel, ‘you did not really hear that absurd report you told Captain Tournay just now?’

‘Michel, since I came to this country, amongst a set of foreigners, I’m obliged to seek for rational conversation very often with myself. It was in one of these discourses,’ said Mike with a wink, ‘I heard the report I mentioned to the captain.’

‘Oh, Mike. Fie, fie.’

CHAPTER X .

A RIDE SPOILED.

HALF-an-hour had scarcely passed when the Franc-Tireur and his faithful companion presented themselves at the head-quarters of the fort. Captain Tournay had pleaded effectively for the granting of Michel's request. 'If,' he said, 'this handful of men only delay the enemy's works for a day, or curb their boldness in the slightest, they are adequately employed.' The commandant assented, and Michel was called on to specify the exact force he would require. He named fifteen.

'Why do you say fifteen precisely?' asked the commandant.

'Monsieur,' he replied, 'twelve or twenty would answer me almost as well, but I think it simplifies matters and saves discussion to say at once a specific number.'

'A fellow of some sense,' thought the officer to himself. 'Volunteers, of course, you wish for?'

'Yes, monsieur. One man has been already mixed up with me in so many adventures, and has been discussing this one so intimately, that I count on his presence as on my own.'

'Who is that?'

'Le Sergent Michael Mahony.'

'An Irishman?'

'Yes, monsieur.'

'Brave?'

'As a lion.'

'Discreet?'

'As a lawyer.'

'Skilful?'

'As a poacher.'

The commandant laughed. 'If you are as economical of your ammunition as you are of your words, the Germans will find your bullets do a good deal of execution in proportion to number. Let me see this foreign phoenix of yours.'

Sergeant Mahony was called and entered, saluting the commandant with easy condescension.

'Votre honneur,' he began, 'I'm told, a exhibé bien du bon sens——'

'Eh, what is this he is saying?' queried the commandant, who was puzzled by Mike's graceful and original French.

'He does not speak French very well, M. le Commandant,' said Michel with a warning look at his companion, 'but he proposes himself as a volunteer for the expedition.'

'Ah, certainement, Monsieur le Commandant. Je voudrais donner aux Allemands un damned différent souper du quel on en pensent ce soir.'

'En verité, he does not speak very intelligible

French, but his meaning I have no doubt is excellent.'

'Et, votre honneur, comme un relatif par sang du noble Maréchal——'

'Monsieur le Commandant, I take the liberty to ask you for fourteen men more.'

'Very well,' said the commandant, and he gave orders to a subordinate to make out the necessary number of volunteers. He added some general instructions as to the conduct to be observed, and dismissed the men.

As they left head-quarters, Michel's countenance wore an air of cheerfulness more nearly approaching gaiety than it had assumed since the receipt of Annette's darksome letter at Chalons. Mike, on the contrary, seemed to have had his customary gaiety ruffled.

'Qu'avez vous?' said Michel, surprised at his friend's unusual taciturnity and gloom. 'Are you not glad of our expedition?'

'Of course, I am.'

'What is the matter, then? You do not seem like your usual vivacious self.'

'Michel, do you believe I'm telling lies when I say I'm a relative of the Marshal?'

'I believe you are truthful and honourable as any man I have ever met.'

'And why then do you interrupt me whenever I am about to mention——'

'Dear friend,' said Michel earnestly, 'I do not

understand your family pedigree, and do not care for it. You would not stand a jot higher in my esteem, as a faithful and valiant comrade, if you were a marshal yourself. But when you are in presence of superior officers you must make it a rule to confine yourself strictly to answering the questions asked of you, and not wander into merely personal matters. Come, we have our preparations to make for this evening. Your hand.'

'And my heart with it, old lad,' answered Mike as they parted.

'Sergeant Mahony,' said Mike to himself reflectively, as the sound of Michel's footsteps died away, 'Sergeant Mahony, you're a jackass,' with which reflection he betook himself to his abode.

The evening was dark, and but a few stars were visible as the small expedition set out from the fortress. Michel took the command. Indeed as none of the volunteers, except Mike, was his equal in rank, this would have fallen to his share in any case. Advancing by the broad road through the wood, they came out upon the village of Nogent. Mike's fiction of the intended banquet of the Germans had already taken wind and received ready credence.

'Sergeant,' said one of the soldiers, 'would it not be a good plan to set our ambuscade in the houses opposite the hotel where Messieurs les Allemands are going to sup?'

'Sapristi,' said another, 'would it not be much

better to go and eat their supper for them first, and give them a ball afterwards?’

‘Messieurs,’ said Michel decisively, ‘we shall not go into the village at all.’

The tone and the declaration put an end to the discussion, and the party marched on in silence. To avoid the village they had to march over fields and through gardens which lay between it and the river. Portion of the distance they traversed on the railway, and at last they reached again the road which leads to the ruined bridge near Brie, on the opposite bank. Avoiding the bridge, and taking a shallow somewhat lower down, they moved on until they came close to the first houses of Brie, and Michel observed, ‘they must pass here in order to get to Nogent.’

‘Where are we to stay then?’

‘Here,’ said Michel, pointing to a ditch between the towing path by the river and the high road.

‘Ma foi,’ said one of the soldiers who had spoken, ‘my plan of eating their supper would have secured us pleasanter quarters.’

‘And less chance of effective work,’ answered Michel quietly.

It was now nearly ten o’clock. A dead silence seemed to have settled over the whole landscape. The sluggish river scarcely made the faintest sound. In a distant farm-house the baying of a dog was heard, and occasionally the shrill crow of

a night cock. But these sounds only rendered the silence more oppressive. From Brie a slight hum seemed to arise, but it was so uncertain that it was hard to be sure of its existence, much less to distinguish it.

‘It may be Prussians drinking in the village,’ said Michel in a whisper to his most intimate friend.

‘I’d have no objection if it was two French sergeants—one of them an Irishman—that was doing the same,’ was the whispered response.

Slowly, amid the stillness thus unbroken except at rare moments, passed the time. Excitement and expectation kept off the sense of weariness for a while, but hour after hour crept by in the same monotonous current, and there was no sign of the moment for action. The men were brave, and could, with a clearly defined object before them, even be patient; but there was an element of uncertainty in the design of this expedition that gave ready excuse for doubting whether anything would come of it after all. Michel felt this, and guessed only too easily what was passing in the minds of his companions. For him, therefore, the moments went by on leaden wings, and his anxiety had reached a pitch of the keenest intensity as the clock on the tower of Brie rang out the chime ‘two.’ The echo of the bells had, however, hardly died away when a sound caught his ear that brought a fierce joy to his heart.

‘Hark!’ he said.

Every man held his breath. Faintly the sound reached them, and now it failed, but it came again and then again, each time more and more distinct, until at last there could be no shadow of doubt that here were the Prussian cavalry on their night march. Steadily the sound grew, and before long it became apparent that the horse had entered the village from the other end. And now they could hear mingle with the tramp of hoofs the hum of conversation and the loud sounds of laughter. To the ear of the listening Frenchmen, the merriment seemed like a mockery of their country and its defeat, and every rifle was grasped with a sterner grip. Michel cast a keen glance down through the street of the village, and he could see the little sparks which marked the cigars of the officers.

‘Hold your fire,’ he said under his breath, ‘until I give the word.’

The troops advanced. They numbered full three hundred. About half of them had passed when Michel gave the signal ‘fire!’ Immediately a full volley went thundering into the ranks. Horses reared, men fell, the squadron was thrown into the wildest confusion. Scarcely had the first volley been received by the startled cavalry, when crash came another into their midst, and another and another. The ranks were quite broken; they knew not whither to turn or what to do, and still

the deadly fire was poured upon them. But now the houses of Brie opened and some foot-soldiers came out—those whose revelry Michel had suspected—and they directed an aimless, uncertain fire towards the place of ambuscade. At the same moment some shots from the left passed over their heads.

‘Ha!’ said Michel to Mike, ‘there are shots from the other side of the river.’

‘Let them blaze away and be hanged,’ was the answer.

‘No, no, we have done our work and must retreat. If there is any force at that bank we may be turned and caught in a trap.’

‘At all events, let us have another volley at them.’

‘Wait till we have changed our position. If we fire too often from here they will know where we are and guess our strength too.’

Passing the word cautiously to his men, Michel moved them right into the centre of the roadway, whence he delivered a full platoon fire into the enemy. At the short distance the shots told with deadly effect, and even in the gloom it was palpable that they had increased the existing confusion.

‘Now is the moment,’ said Michel, ‘for a retreat. Steady, men.’

And the little band prepared to move, Michel by himself standing out in the rear, the last to leave.

‘Michel,’ said Mike in a whisper, ‘I have a favour to ask you.’

‘What is it, good friend?’

‘That you let me be the man to cover the retreat.’

‘Impossible, Mike—ask me anything but that. My duty and my honour alike forbid me. Keep to the ranks, cher ami.’

‘Michel, I don’t think I’ll ever forgive you. Hang me if I wouldn’t sooner you denied my relationship to the Marshal.’

CHAPTER XI.

SENTINELS ON DUTY.

IT was four o'clock when the French party reached the fortress. They were admitted and received with much interest. Through the silence of the night the sound of musketry had reached the fort in a fitful manner, and the consciousness that comrades were actually engaged at so short a distance produced deep anxiety in the breasts of the guard. As the little band entered they were assailed with questions and remarks.

'What has happened?' 'You are all over mud.' 'Any wounded?' 'What has become of the Prussians?'

These and a thousand other questions were poured into the ears of the expeditionary party. Their appearance was certainly calculated to excite surprise, if not admiration. Most of them, even to their faces, were covered with mud; they bore an air of extreme fatigue; two had slight wounds, one with a cheek grazed and the other an arm hurt. But there was through all an evident consciousness of achievement which took

from them the forlorn look that so often goes with soldiers in their condition.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said Mike Mahony, who was perfectly ready to answer any questions, ‘the supper was spoiled but the investment was commemorated. Some of them Prussians will remember it as long as they live.’

Michel had commenced a more precise account, when the commandant himself appeared in the guard-room. The brave officer was restless and uneasy until he had heard the result of the nocturnal raid. Michel gave him a detailed and formal report of their proceedings, and as the commandant listened, his eye sparkled, and numerous ejaculations attested the interest and delight he took in the narrative. When it came to a conclusion he asked, ‘what were the Prussian losses?’

Michel could not tell, but considered they were serious.

‘Are you too fatigued to go upon the terrain once more, and show it to an officer?’

‘By no means, monsieur; I am ready to leave at once.’

‘I will give you an hour to rest. Starting then it will be daylight by the time you reach Brie, and it will be possible to form some estimate of how much this affair has cost the enemy.’

In an hour, as appointed, Michel was in readiness outside the quarters of the adjutant who had

been assigned to accompany him. Captain and Adjutant Roubaix was an old soldier who had seen much service, but had not received very rapid promotion, and consequently was inclined to regard military enthusiasm in rather a cynical aspect. When told of Michel's adventure, and the commission required of him, he bluntly said to the commandant that he thought he was sending him on a fool's errand. He was, however, too thorough a soldier to dream of really disobeying the command.

'Halloa, Sergeant Munchausen, are you there?' he cried as Michel knocked at his door. 'Have you a balloon ready to transport us to the scene of this battle in the clouds?'

Michel smiled good-humouredly. 'Walking will be more practicable, monsieur.'

'I'm afraid it has been found practicable by a lot of those fellows you slew this morning.'

'Many of the Prussians, I know, went away, monsieur, fast enough, but I think a good many of them, if they are gone, did not go without help.'

'Then you think they are all departed dead and alive.'

'The Prussians always carry off their dead and wounded at the first opportunity.'

'Then I am, I suppose, to go and see the place where a lot of Prussians might have been slain?'

'Monsieur, I am at your orders.'

‘Confound it, it is I who in effect am at yours.’

‘Pardon, monsieur—’

‘Come along, and let me have the details of the romance to lighten the way.’

Their route was pretty nearly the same the party had traversed during the night, the actual distance being increased by the detour made to avoid the village of Nogent. It was already broad day when they approached Brie. With habitual caution, Michel listened for any sound that might indicate the presence of the enemy. None was heard save the whinnying of a horse. Taking advantage of some inequalities and projections, he stole cautiously up to the scene of combat, followed by the officer.

An ejaculation escaped the latter. ‘What the deuce are all these horses?’ he exclaimed, pointing to the carcasses which, dead and dying, filled the roadway.

‘They were ridden by the force we assailed last night.’

‘Parbleu. And where are the men?’

‘As I said, Monsieur le Capitaine, the Prussians always carry off their dead and wounded at the first opportunity.’

‘Well, no doubt, the horses could not be slain and the men safe.’

‘I think so, monsieur.’

‘And in the name of Heaven, how many horses

are there? Twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty—why, there are fifty at least!’

‘Quite that, monsieur.’

‘That staggers me! Sergeant, I will not call you Munchausen any more, but a very brave and capable fellow.’

‘I am very grateful to you, monsieur.’

‘I shall report to the commandant what I have seen, and express my opinion that the tale of your exploits has not been in the smallest degree exaggerated.’

Michel bowed his acknowledgments. ‘Has Monsieur le Capitaine occasion for my further attendance?’

‘Ha, I do not wonder you should be anxious to get to repose.’

‘Well, it is not precisely for repose I ask monsieur’s permission to leave him.’

‘For what then?’

‘Last night I observed that while we were engaged with the Prussians there were several musket-shots fired at us from our own side of the river, as if the enemy had established a main-guard there, and I wish to investigate it.’

‘Have you not had enough work for one night?’

‘I am not tired, monsieur, and this post may be in our way in future.’

‘And suppose you find it, what do you propose to do?’

‘On that I have not made up my mind yet. It must depend on what I discover.’

‘My impression is that you would do better to rest and refresh yourself, that you might then be in fitter condition for adventures, if you will persist in seeking them.’

‘Monsieur, I could not rest with this on my mind. Have I your permission?’

‘Well, if you will persist, go; but be careful. After all you are a useful man, and it would be a pity to waste your life without a reasonable prospect of advantage.’

‘Monsieur is very good. I will be careful. Adieu, monsieur.’

‘Farewell.’

The captain with his long strides soon disappeared, and Michel was left alone. He examined the ground cautiously, displaying his person as little as possible, when his attention was attracted by the sound of oars. In the grey light he saw a boat, and could plainly enough distinguish the forms that occupied it. There were four sitters, and two who pulled. The boat pushed from a point at the farther end of the village, and crossed the stream towards the broken arches of the bridge which had been destroyed in anticipation of the siege.

‘Ha,’ thought Michel to himself, ‘they have made a post of the ruins, and established themselves therefore half a mile nearer to us than we

thought. That arrangement cannot be left undisturbed.'

As he watched, he saw the boat land and four men get out. In a few minutes four men returned. At the distance he could not be quite sure of their appearance, but he made no doubt that one was the same who had left the boat—the sergeant, in fact—and that the others were three sentries who had been relieved.

'There are, then,' he thought, 'three on guard.'

He looked to the breech of his gun, he examined the chambers of his revolver. By his side hung the sword-bayonet, which he had thrust into his belt naked, that the *klirr* of the scabbard might not make a noise. His way to the ruins lay over fields, and through ditches, now running, now hiding, until at last he came within ear-shot of the sentries. Two of them were on beat in sight of each other; the third was concealed from his comrades by one of the abutments of the bridge. As the sentries met upon their march they usually interchanged a few words—they seemed even at first to Michel's ear to be peculiarly earnest. Drawing yet closer, he could distinguish the words, which, from his Alsatian knowledge of German, he easily comprehended.

'Over fifty dragoons killed and wounded, and three foot soldiers, I heard the Hauptmann say.'

'Der Teufel!'

There was a silence. The sentries had again

parted, each to his beat, Michel watching attentively. Once more the footsteps indicated a rapprochement, and the conversation was renewed.

‘How many of them?’

‘Nobody can tell; it was dark. Hundreds, I suppose. It takes a good many of them together to have courage enough to fire on a German.’

Again a pause as the sentries parted, and once more the footsteps tended towards each other.

‘Was he there?’

‘Der Franc-Tireur?’

‘Yes.’

‘I do not know. Of course, the scoundrel was.’

Silence again except for the echoing footsteps, and conversation once more renewed.

‘I have an idea.’

‘Mein Gott!’

‘Ja. I will kill that Franc-Tireur. I will find him out myself and kill him.’

‘So gut.’

And they parted. Michel, who had held himself in readiness for the moment when the sentries were turned back to back, sprang upon the man who said he would kill him, and with a blow of the naked sword laid him low. The slight noise caused his comrade to turn and level his musket, but before he could fire he dropped struck by a bullet from Michel’s rifle. The third sentry, aroused by the report, rushed from his post behind

the abutment. Michel was already in the act of re-loading his rifle. The Prussian put his gun to his shoulder. There were but fifty paces between them. Michel, perfectly undisturbed, looked steadily in the face of the sentry while he continued to put the charge into his musket, which, even with the facilities offered by the chasseur, occupied some precious seconds.

‘It is a duel,’ he said in German, ‘and you have the first fire.’

As he spoke the Prussian discharged his piece. The shot whistled by Michel’s ear ; Michel fired and the third sentry fell.

‘I think,’ he said to himself, as he made his way back to the fortress, ‘they will draw back that post for the future.’

CHAPTER XII.

THE TWO UHLANS.

THERE was, perhaps, no feature of the Franco-Prussian War more peculiar than 'the two Uhlans.' Everywhere before the German army there were seen this ubiquitous pair. Miles ahead of the main body on every possible road were two horsemen reconnoitring. The Germans themselves love to tell wonderful stories of the adventures of these scouts, and the captures they made. There is no doubt that these amazing tentaculæ, spread in every direction over the line of march of the German army, warning of difficulties, discovering weak points, bringing to light objects of plunder, intimating where the largest resources could be found, contributed much to the ultimate success of its campaign. Amongst Frenchmen naturally the facility and impunity with which this weapon was employed against them awakened intense indignation. It seemed not only a humiliation but an injury, and amongst the soldiers who talked thoughtfully of the war it was a subject of frequent conversation.

An old soldier of the imperial guard was speaking on the subject with our friends Michel and Mike. Taking his pipe from his mouth, he remarked sententiously, 'an army which allows another to clench its fist in its face cannot be expected to do much good.'

'What do you mean?' asked Michel.

'I mean that to have a couple of Prussian horsemen riding within shot of the guns of the fort here, spying and peering and bringing back information of what we are doing, is so shameful that the army which endures it must come to trouble.'

'I have heard of these horsemen going reconnoitring in twos through the open country, but it is not possible they do it here?'

The veteran took his pipe from his mouth, slowly emitted a puff, and said, 'I had a letter the other day from my nephew, who is a sergeant at St Denis. He saw two horsemen coming up to within a mile of the fort. I know two were seen from Fort de Noisy, and one of our lieutenants, who had a glass, saw them from the Redoute de Nogent.'

Michel was thoughtful.

'We have cavalry to ride through the Boulevards in the city,' continued the old man in a grumbling tone; 'it would be better for the horses' health and for ours that they took an airing outside the walls here.'

'I think,' said Michel deliberately, 'it is pos-

sible to mar their expedition here, even without horsemen.'

'Oh, I know you managed a clever trap for those fellows at Brie, but, my son, it is easier to catch a squadron napping than a couple of advanced videttes.'

'No doubt, but it is worth trying.'

'Have you any plan in your head?' asked Mike, who had listened to the conversation with attention.

'No, it would be impossible to form any. Their movements are directed by chance, or at all events by motives that we cannot divine, and we must only look to chance to fall in with them.'

'Well, anyhow if we try for it we try together, I suppose?'

'I think it would be better we should separate. I would like to take the Strasbourg road between Nogent and Neuilly.'

'And you leave me to kill a Hessian for myself?'

'I do not understand.'

'Oh, no matter. What post do you assign to me?'

'Well, if they are very daring they may try the cross road, past the Chateau de Montreau, and the wood of Neuilly. It is not a thousand metres from the fort of Nogent, but they seem to be under the impression that we sleep night and day.'

‘And what, my lads, will you do, suppose you meet two Uhlans a-piece?’

‘Kill them,’ answered Michel shortly.

‘Try, at all events,’ said Mike Mahony with a capital attempt to look modest.

The veteran laughed loud. ‘Well, my children, I think you have plenty of audacity, and audacity is a good thing in war, provided there be not too much of it.’ And shaking the ashes out of his pipe, the honest soldier departed.

Michel had now acquired the freedom of coming and going which his special pursuit needed, and he was able to secure the same privilege for his comrade. There was no need therefore to allow any delay to interfere between the conception and execution of a project which depended on themselves. A demand for volunteers even would have been by this time easily acceded to, but the project in hand was not one to which Michel thought it advisable to bring the aid of numbers. The preparations of the comrades were soon made, and at mid-day they had passed out of the fort, the sergeant of the guard merely remarking with a laugh, ‘Out for sport to-day.’

‘No, only to try and spoil some,’ answered Mike gaily.

The companions proceeded through the wood of Vincennes at the skirt of which they took the road lying under Fort Nogent, keeping the village on their right.

‘What would you think of trying the village?’ asked Mike.

‘We should be at a considerable disadvantage there if they had any soldiers in the houses.’

About a mile after quitting the wood they had reached the point where their roads parted, as Michel intimated to his friend.

‘Adieu, mon camarade,’ said Michel.

‘Good-bye, and good luck,’ answered Mike, with a hearty shake of the hand.

‘Thank Heaven,’ said Michel to himself, ‘there can be no possible danger in the direction in which I have sent him.’

‘If one could be angry,’ said Mike in soliloquy, ‘with so good a fellow, he would be for the way he tries to keep all the danger for himself, and to keep me out of it. Its being trayted like a babby in arms—an’ I a soldier in arms.’ And Mike smiled at his own conceit. ‘Well, who knows but I may have a chance of showing I can walk aloney.’

Michel marched along for some distance keeping the high road, and with a keen eye open to descry any approaching object. After a while, however, he thought it more prudent to quit it, and to leave the causeway free for the expected enemy. The peculiar nature of the ground, broken up into small enclosures, rendered progress here very difficult, but mere difficulty or fatigue could not turn him aside from any course he had resolved

to adopt. One disadvantage he experienced, however, in this mode of progress was, that the height of the hedges occasionally proved greater than he wished, and not only guarded him effectually from observation but shut out his view of the road. He had come to such a spot in the corner called the Four-à-Chaux. The dense vegetation all around had made him feel as if he were in a thicket, and his anxiety was increased by the notion that he had heard the tramp of horses' feet. If it were so, he thought to himself, it must have ceased, for now as he got near the spot whence it seemed to have proceeded he could hear it no longer.

Reflecting thus, he drew closer to the road's edge with his accustomed caution, and stepped from the bushes out upon a small plot of grass a few feet square. Even he was startled to encounter there the gleam of a pair of coal black eyes, and the form of a Prussian trooper. But not for a moment did his presence of mind desert him. The Prussian laid his hand upon his sword and had it half drawn from his scabbard when Michel's naked blade was quivering in his heart. Michel knew that his enemy's comrade would be placed on the alert by even the slight noise that had taken place. The unfortunate fellow who fell had given his rein to the other, while he descended to search the copse where he fancied he had observed something suspicious. The second, thinking lightly of the cause which had aroused his comrade's atten-

tion, carelessly dismounted also. When the slight noise of the scuffle near alarmed him he at first ran to the edge of the road with the intention of entering the bushes. There he changed his mind, and made back for the horses. The indecision was fatal to him. He was in the act of clambering into his saddle when Michel sprang from the hedge sword in hand. A blow, and he was a corpse upon the road. The horses, startled at the conflict, and missing the hands to which they had been accustomed, flung up their heads in the air and galloped off. Michel looked after them with an air of vexation.

‘It is very well to have taught these Prussians a lesson, but it would have made the little feat perfect if I could only have brought in the horses.’ And he turned his steps homeward by no means so elated with his achievement as might have been expected.

Entering the gate of the fortress he met, beside the regular guard, a good many loungers. Amongst them was the old soldier of the morning. Michel’s appearance was the signal for a hundred questions, his vexed air leading to the idea that he had met with some signal failure.

‘Well,’ said the veteran, with a laugh, ‘you have seen the two Uhlans, I suppose.’

‘I have,’ said Michel gravely.

‘You have?’ cried numbers in chorus.

‘Yes.’

‘Where are they?’

‘They are dead.’

‘Dead!’ ‘Where?’ ‘When?’ ‘How?’ ‘Tell us all about it,’ was shouted in many voices.

‘I met them between Nogent and Neuilly and—if their comrades have not removed them—they are there still.’

One of the soldiers present uttered a slight murmur of incredulity.

‘What is this?’ said the old soldier, pointing to Michel’s naked blade. ‘There is the mark of serious work on that sword.’

All eyes were turned to the fearful evidences of conflict, which marred the glitter of the steel, and there was no longer any doubt expressed.

‘But, my lad,’ continued the old man, ‘you do not seem much in love with your achievement. What ails you?’

‘Oh, it is nothing after all. But I confess I am mortified that I failed to catch and bring in these fellows’ horses.’

‘Ah, it is a pity. But after all, the chief job was accomplished, so make your mind easy. Tell us the particulars.’

‘Willingly, but first please have Sergeant Mahony called. I should like him to hear it, as he was my companion going out this morning.’

‘He has not returned yet.’

‘What!’ said Michel turning pale, ‘not returned yet? Excuse me, messieurs, if I defer my

story until I have ascertained what has become of my comrade.'

Michel's observation was greeted with a loud laugh from a zouave, who stood posted at the gate where a view down the roadway was commanded.

'What is the meaning of that?' asked Michel angrily.

'That you need not be so anxious about your comrade. Apparently he is very well able to take care of himself.'

All eyes were turned in the direction pointed to by the zouave, and there, sure enough, was Monsieur Mahony in perfect health and comfort, sitting easily astride of a horse and leading another by the bridle.

'There are your horses, Sergeant,' was cried by a dozen mouths.

Mike rode leisurely up and entered the gate. Looking round him with his usual affability, he remarked that he was glad to see so many of his friends to receive him.

'Ah, Mike,' said Michel, warmly, 'you have completed my task even though we were apart.'

'So I guessed,' said Mike coolly. 'When these beasts went light the way I saw them, I suspected 'twas you persuaded the riders to get off.'

Michel, of course, had to satisfy the curiosity of the auditors, and his narrative was heard with the interest and admiration that might have been ex-

pected. Leisure was then afforded to follow the fortunes of Sergeant Mahony, who disdained to conceal any of the particulars of the adventure.

‘When I was by myself and without a comrade,’ said the adventurer, ‘I began to think of a good many things, and especially I thought how much I’d like to meet Count Bismarck then and there. But, you know, it’s what one is wishing for never happens, and if you’ll believe me, the ill-minded rascal never came up to say “Stand out before me and we’ll settle this business like men.” So I trudged along till I came to Nogent wood, and there upon the edge I sat and looked at the lock of my gun, and measured the length of my sword, and wondered if my friend Michel had sent me in this direction to rob birds’ nests, for the deuce another thing there appeared to me to do. All of a sudden, however, I heard the tramp of horses’ feet on the hard sod below the wood. ‘Sergeant Mahony,’ said I to myself, ‘prepare to receive cavalry.’ So I looked to the gun again and I saw that the sword was loose in my belt, and I lay down flat on my hands. Well, I had not long to wait when, bounding over the hedges, I saw two horses with empty saddles. The creatures looked wild and scared, and they scampered about in a mad fashion for a while. But there was a little stream just at the edge of the trees, and along the border of it the loveliest bit of green grass you ever saw. Now to see these two

horses—'twas like doubtful voters at an election smelling a bribe—so gradually did they get tamed down, so slowly did they border round and round it, till at last they forgot Prussian discipline and the German sense of duty, and settled themselves steadily down to the sweet bite by the stream. 'My beauty,' said I to myself, 'if I don't ride you that's near me, may Mike Mahony be sent walking home on crutches!' The stream wasn't wide—an easy jump of a few feet—but my lad's head was towards me. I daren't show until I had a hold of him, or he would be off, and good-bye to my chance. His eyes were still wild, and very little I knew would make him start. But though he was uneasy and kept shifting about, it seemed as if he would never turn the way I wanted him, with his flank towards me. I watched and watched, and waited. At last I thought I must risk it and do something. He still had his head to me, but now not full front—but a little sideways. I considered that with a spring I could catch his mane, and once with a hold of that—why, it was between him and me. So at last I made a jump and caught the mane with one hand, and luckily hit off the saddle with the other. He reared a little, but not so high but that I was able to swing myself up, and to my delight I was in the seat. The bridle was my great difficulty, but we in the County Limberick know something about a horse. Though it was everywhere—under his

legs, about his head, frightening him just as if it was a whip somebody was whacking him with, I got hold enough of it to teach him that a master could be found for him outside of the Prussian riding-school, and before I was ten minutes on his back—and he never shook me off—I was not afraid to get down and set his head gear all straight. The other then was my difficulty, but here the bridle stood to me. At first he took the alarm and galloped furiously away—but he stood stock still about two hundred yards off. Then he made a plunge and threw his heels up in the air, and prepared for another start with a buck jump, but this time he had got the bridles so tangled in his legs that he was fairly puzzled. The difficulty of moving bothered him, and he began to consider, and while he was considering the smell of the grass came up under his nose, and faith he forgot all about his hurry home to bugle call, and munched away. Seeing how things were going on, I let my animal drop down his head and have a bite, still keeping a hold of the rein. Now if you ever saw two burnt nuts in a basin of water on a snap-apple night coming together, you will have a notion of what two horses in a field will do. I waited and waited, and at last sure enough, little by little, and never looking at each other, my two nags came so close that I was able to get hold of the reins of my shy friend as well as of my own beast. It took as much trouble

I can tell you to get him out of the tangle he had worked himself into as it does a patriot to wriggle out of the promises he makes to his countrymen ; but the County Limberick, glory be to God, gives a fellow a good education in horses at all events, and—you see,' said Mike, pointing to the two steeds.

A chorus of 'bravos,' greeted the end of Mike's narrative.

'Messieurs,' he added, '*la grande armée* of Le Voss—et—Mahony has routed the enemy. The right wing has put them to the sword, and the left wing has brought home the prisoners.'

CHAPTER XIII.

PERILS OF SURVEYING.

THE pretty village of Nogent, like most of the spots lying within and near the lines of German investment, was deserted by the inhabitants. It was, indeed, covered by the guns of the fort, which came up pretty close to it, but it could not be considered secure from raids by the enemy, and it was known that posts of Prussians had absolutely occupied the deserted houses. It was, therefore, with considerable caution that one morning a party under the command of Lieutenant Brantome entered. Though the force did not comprise thirty in all, a regular order of march was observed, videttes being thrown out in front, and the rear carefully watched by a guard. The lieutenant was a foppish, but a pleasant, affable young fellow, and stood on the best terms with all he commanded. He had an especial regard for Michel, in whose adventures he took great delight, and the only point of dispute between them was his anxiety to take share.

‘Impossible, monsieur!’ Michel would say to

him. 'I am no use unless left to my own devices.'

'But who will prevent you? Not I.'

'Monsieur, you are lieutenant — I sergeant. So long as we are together I must be under your orders.'

'Ah,' observes the lieutenant, with a slight laugh, which could not conceal a shade of vexation, 'and you do not consider me competent to give orders?'

'Monsieur, pardon me. In the field of battle there is no officer I would more willingly follow, but the task of a franc-tireur is—is one that hardly admits of officership at all.'

'And besides, your honour,' gravely added Mike Mahony, 'it would be next door to a murder to spoil the beautiful uniforms you wear.'

The lieutenant looked closely at Mike, half-uncertain whether or not he should feel offended. But nothing could exceed the profound respect of Sergeant Mahony's aspect, and he let his suspicions pass by.

'The search of these houses must be thorough. It will not do to let the enemy effect a lodgement here.'

'Any one of them that takes lodgings here certainly,' said Mike, 'ought to be made to pay for them through the skin.'

'That house which crosses the village, monsieur, ought be occupied at once, as it commands the

rest, and then the search could be got through more securely.'

'Right, Sergeant; I regret you are not an officer.'

'Monsieur, I am perfectly satisfied, so long as I am fighting the enemies of my country in any grade.'

Half-a-dozen men were despatched to the house in question. It was a dwelling of considerable size which abutted upon the street of the village, and afforded from its side windows a view of the others. The door stood shut to, but unbolted, and was easily pushed in. The great bulk of the furniture still remained, the inhabitants in their haste having removed only light articles or absolute necessities. It had evidently been occupied by people in easy circumstances, for there was a tone of comfort if not of absolute elegance in its appearance. It is an awkward task entering a house where a concealed enemy may be found, and it was with much circumspection that the Frenchmen, at the head of whom was Sergeant Mahony, passed from room to room. There was no risk, however. There was no foe to be found.

'We may take it easy, boys,' remarked the sergeant. 'There was never a Prussian here. Look at the kitchen clock where it is. It's no great things to be sure, but if ever one of them entered the house it wouldn't escape.'

The result of the search being conveyed to the

officer in command the party were ordered to keep a strict watch, and the investigation of the rest of the village was proceeded with. Only in the auberge and a few houses near it were any traces of the Germans seen. In the former bottles and glasses were found in great numbers, broken, and their fragments strewn about. Some benches still remained intact in the pleasure-grounds where the visitors used to enjoy themselves, but many were in fragments as if they had been torn in a fray. The cellar door was open. The searchers penetrated it, but it was so dark that they could not see. A light, however, was procured, and they then perceived that one or two of the wine casks had been destroyed, while the contents of the others had been let run out through the cocks. The floor was still oozy with the wine that had been spilled.

‘What is this?’ cried one of the soldiers as he tripped over something in the gloom.

The light was brought. There lay the body of a Prussian soldier dead. In his right hand was a bottle of eau de vie empty. His head lay under the cock of one of the casks. There was no wound upon his person. It was evident that in a drunken fit he had let the wine run over him until he was suffocated.

‘Let the beast lie in the lair he has chosen,’ said the young officer, and they left the auberge. ‘It appears,’ he remarked after a while to

Michel, 'that our visit here has been very un-
availing.'

'Monsieur, I do not think it has been useless, though it is not very agreeable. It shows that the Germans have been here, and revelling as it were under our very noses.'

'True, but what then?'

'Surely, monsieur, that ought not to be.'

'I grant, but how to prevent it? We cannot be sure of the time they will come here, otherwise I should be glad to be out to meet them; but the chances are a thousand to one we should never hit off the time when they were here.'

'No doubt,' said Michel thoughtfully, 'but still I think we have not been uselessly employed, and perhaps we may find out the use of our work better before we go away.'

'Possibly, but I am tired of this do-nothing sort of manœuvre. When I find there is no enemy, nor one likely to be perhaps for a week, I do not see much to amuse in waiting.'

'Will monsieur wait for a couple of hours at least?'

'Oh,' said the lieutenant with a laugh, 'I will do that much for you, though I do not see very well what it is to bring.'

'Nor I, monsieur, for that matter, but in the task of watching the outposts of the enemy, and endeavouring to hinder them, I have always found patience very useful.'

‘Well, let us go to the first house, where we have left the Irlandais and his party in charge.’

The officer proposed this movement in mere restlessness, but Michel remarked, ‘You are right, monsieur, it is an excellent look-out station.’

They proceeded to the house in question, where they found Monsieur Mahony entertaining four of the men who were not actually on the look-out with an exposition of the pedigrees of the Mahonys and MacMahons, and the remarkable manner in which the branches of these family trees had intertwined. As the officer and Michel entered Mike started from the sofa on which he had been reclining with easy grace, and paid his superior the delicate compliment of removing from his mouth the short pipe which had lent a flavour to his narrative.

‘Votre honneur est bienvenu,’ said he with his customary friendliness to the lieutenant.

‘Sergeant, can you tell us what we are to do here to destroy the Prussian army?’ asked the officer laughingly.

‘Faith, M. l’officier, I don’t know, but there is a high roof to this house and a capital look-out; and if we went there and surveyed the country we might know better what to do.’

‘Allons,’ said the young officer, who was glad to move anywhere and do anything rather than sit aimlessly still. ‘I am told,’ he observed to

Michel, as they mounted the stairs, 'that you are a good shot at a thousand metres.'

Michel shook his head. 'Monsieur, firing at a thousand metres I regard as mere waste of ammunition. Three hundred is a good, sure shot; four hundred affords pretty fair chance of success.'

'This is provoking,' observed the lieutenant as they entered the garret. There were two windows, but they looked towards Fort Nogent, the opposite direction to that in which the enemy was to be sought.

'We must make windows,' said Mike Mahony, applying the butt of his musket to one of the tiles on the dark side, which clattered down into the court below. This afforded him a perfect look-out, but a lower one had to follow the first, Mike observing that it was no use to see unless you had a chance of hitting too.

'A good idea,' said Michel, following his friend's example.

'It's thoughtful of us, after all, to be airing the house for the poor things that are left it,' remarked Mike.

'Monsieur,' said Michel, 'I perceive you have a spy-glass with you.'

'My lorgnette, ay.' Here the young lieutenant's face grew sentimental. 'How many a time I have levelled these barrels at the countenance of beauty, in the blaze of gaiety at the grand opera——.'

'If monsieur would be kind enough,' interrupted Michel, drily, 'to direct his glass towards the farther side of the railway bridge, and tell me what he sees there, I should feel much obliged.'

'Eh,' said the lieutenant, feeling himself rather snubbed, but applying the glasses to his eyes and following the direction indicated, 'By Heavens, there's a fellow there—a Prussian—you can see his dress—and, what? as I live he is actually making a survey of the terrain or something of the kind. Here,' he added, handing the glass to Michel, 'you can see his very note-book.'

'Ay,' said Michel, taking a long look, 'big, yellow whiskers, large book, pencil I think—just as I suspected.'

Michel, with the lieutenant's permission, handed the glass to Mike, who declared that the fellow had something like a surveying instrument near him, and the devil's impudence.

'It is a long shot to him?' said the lieutenant inquiringly.

'Yes, it is nearly five hundred metres.'

'Yet he cannot be permitted to go on like that. It would be too bad.'

'Do not fear, monsieur. I think he will not survey much more. Mike, would you like to try him?'

'No,' said Mike, 'if you miss I'll try, but there is not much chance of that.'

Michel took a long and steady gaze at the sur-

veyor, lifted his rifle slowly, resting it upon the uppermost portion of the tile next the hole, and fired. As the little puff of smoke from the rifle cleared they saw the body stagger, fall, and roll down into the hollow way which led to the viaduct. The Frenchmen looked at each other for a moment, and at last the officer exclaimed ;

‘A splendid shot!’

‘You see, monsieur,’ said Mike, ‘up to this they have been studying this country with a Surveying-made-Easy, and it is time they learned that it isn’t all fun.’

‘You are right, Irlandais.’

‘Ah, Mike,’ said Michel, ‘I am afraid it was selfish of me to have deprived you of that chance of a shot.’

‘Don’t be uneasy, it won’t be long till my turn comes.’

‘How?’ said the lieutenant laughing, ‘you don’t think another fellow will come there surveying?’

‘No, monsieur, I think they have enough of that diversion for a while; but them Prussians, you see, can’t bear to have it seen that one of them was killed, and they’ll be out to get the body. Wait a bit, and you’ll see if the undertaker doesn’t come out after the surveyor.’

Mike’s suggestion did not seem improbable, and they agreed to wait. Full half-an-hour had elapsed, and the lieutenant, who endeavoured to

while away the time between knocking his scabbard against his boot, and humming *j'aime les militaires*, was beginning to grow impatient, when Mike called out, 'Lieutenant, dear, your glass—votre lorgnette, votre honneur.'

The lieutenant handed him the glass.

'Wasn't I right?' said Mike exultingly, 'look at one fellow crawling out there, and look at another after, peeping from behind the parapet wall. Now, Michel, I'll take the first, but I'll give you a couple of seconds to see if the other comes out. Take a look—quick.' §

'You are right. There are more still, I see two helmets above the parapet. Are you ready?'

'Ready, I think your fellow is outside the parapet.'

'He is. Fire, you.'

Mike fired. The soldier who had just reached the body of his comrade was seen to fall prostrate over him; the second sprang into the air, and tumbled over the low parapet into the field beneath.

'The glass, the glass, Michel!'

'Here.'

'By japers, there they go. Do you see the helmets stealing along by the parapet? Well, well, I don't know whether we're good Christians after all. It was no sin to spoil a supper, but I'm not sure whether it isn't heathen conduct to interfere with a wake.'

CHAPTER XIV.

NO NOISE !

‘ **W**HITHER are we going ? ’
 ‘ To Nogent for the present.’

‘ ’Tis a very clear and lightsome night for the journey.’

‘ Don’t speak so loud.’

‘ Eh, comrade, you are very sharp.’

The last speaker was a corporal of the line who had volunteered to join the franc-tireur in one of his expeditions. It was Michel with whom he remonstrated. Michel answered him quietly.

‘ We have not come out for child’s play.’

‘ You are right, no doubt, comrade,’ was the good-humoured answer of the corporal. And he proceeded to take a pipe and some tobacco from his pocket.

‘ As one cannot talk,’ he murmured, ‘ one may as well relieve the feelings in a smoke.’

‘ Défense de fumer,’ said Michel.

‘ Eh, what ? Forbidden to smoke ! ’

‘ As I have said, we do not come out here for amusement. We are advancing towards a watch-

ful enemy, and the spark in that pipe of yours may draw a bullet in amongst us here.'

The corporal put up his pipe with a scarcely concealed sigh, and the march proceeded.

A cough was heard.

'Who is that? Answer.'

There was no response.

'Messieurs, I must know.'

'It is I, Jean Gros.'

'Jean, mon ami, I am sorry that you should suffer, but there is no help for it, you must return.'

'My cold is a nothing——' but a recurrence of the cough contradicted the assertion ere it was made.

'Jean, bon camarade, we cannot break the rules. A man who coughs is a peril to us, and you must return. Get well, old friend, and be ready to lend us your brave help soon.'

Jean Gros, a hardy soldier, ventured no more remonstrance, but with a downcast air turned back towards the fort, and disappeared in the gloom of the Park of Vincennes.

'Messieurs,' said Michel, turning to the remainder of the party, 'you see that loud talking is forbidden, and that coughing cannot be tolerated. Let me add now one word of warning. Watchfulness is the essence of our success. If I catch any man asleep while on duty, I will blow his brains out; if any man catches me in that

condition he is bound to do the same to me. Al-lons.'

They entered the village. It was like entering a desert, save that there was a horrible incongruity in the silence spread over the habitations of men that is not noticed in the absence of sound in the wilderness. Cautiously as they strode in the darkness, it seemed as if their footsteps gave forth an echo. Michel, taking Mike and the corporal with him, and leaving the remainder of the party below on watch, went up-stairs into the vacant house from which they had done such execution on the viaduct. Though he did not like to employ a light, yet it was necessary for his purpose to do so, as he wanted to ascertain whether there were any traces of the enemy having come to search the house, as they probably would have done if they were able to identify it as that from which the fatal shots had proceeded.

'Ha,' said the corporal, as the light fell upon a glittering glass ornament on the mantel-piece, 'a pretty toy. It is useless here, and it will fit into my cartouche box, and win me favour in the eyes of Lisette.'

'Defense d'emporter le moindre objet d'aucune maison,' said Michel in the tone of one repeating a lesson.

'Le diable !' said the corporal vexed.

'It is forbidden to touch the smallest object in any house. If plunder even to the least extent

were once permitted, our business would soon be forgotten.'

'And beside,' added Sergeant Mahony, who had hitherto remained silent, 'it would be learning manners from the Germans, and that—' Mike ended with a gesture of disdain.

'Why we free-shooters are bound under harder rules than the most strictly disciplined portion of the army,' said the corporal.

'Do you not see the necessity of it?'

'Well, I do.'

The conversation ended, the party proceeded to the extempore observatory which they had established for themselves. From Nogent to Neuilly-sur-Marne there stretches a plain two or three miles in extent, across which they bent an anxious and searching glance. The night was tranquil, but dark. It was one favourable for the conveyance of any sound, but when it was all but impossible to distinguish any dark object unless quite close at hand. They hoped, therefore, more from hearing than from sight, and were busy listening for the tramp of horses or the march of men when, simultaneously, the watchers exclaimed, and pointed to what seemed a spark in the distance. As they looked, it brightened and rose to a blaze, and then died away. They had not been two minutes observing it when it had totally disappeared.

'Well, Mike?'

'You are right. There is a large farm over there—a flat building, you recollect—not very far from Neuilly. That I think is the spot. But why,' observed Michel reflectively, 'should they have made such a display of light? It could not be a signal.'

'No such fools. Michel, they say the Germans are bound up tight in discipline, but Bismarck or Blucher—the Devil or Doctor Foster—wouldn't keep the pipe out of their mouths, and that's a spark in the straw yard, believe me.'

'I have no doubt you are correct. Come, we shall make them pay the penalty of their inconsiderateness.'

They descended, and set out in the direction of the farm. Before quitting the village, Michel called his comrade's attention to one of the men, a small, active-looking mobile, named Richard. 'I was deceived,' he said, 'by his appearance at first, but now that I have seen him march I can perceive that he is totally unable to handle arms. Keep an eye on him, and detain him at the rear, as we go along.'

Mike kept the little moblot by his side. Conversation except in whispers was impossible, even under his breath Mike contrived to establish a communication.

‘How do you like your chassepot?’

‘You mean this?’ showing his gun.

‘Yes, the beauty.’

‘It makes a very loud report when it goes off.’

‘Oh, lord,’ groaned Mike. ‘Is that all you know about it? Can you load it?’

‘Excellently. It is loaded now, and it was I did it myself.’

‘Show me how?’

The mobile explained, and Mike found that this at least he understood.

‘Have you been taught the sword exercise?’

The mobile shook his head.

‘Do you know how to fix on the sword?’

‘Well, I have done it, but I am not sure in the dark.’

‘Comrade,’ said Mike, ‘you have come into a business that requires all a man’s dexterity and nerve. You should not have volunteered until you were perfectly sure of the way to handle your weapons.’

‘I am sorry, Sergeant,’ said the poor moblot quite crest-fallen.

‘Never mind, old fellow,’ said Mike encouragingly, ‘you have the best stuff of a soldier in you. Weapons, you see, are only like the hot water—they never make the real thing unless the spirit is there. But that’s more of your ignorance. Of course, you don’t in the least understand what I mean.’

The mobile confessed his deficiency.

‘Never mind. But now until you are better accustomed to the work you can’t be a front rank man. Stand behind me, should a row come, and don’t fire unless in the last extremity.’

With this the whispered conversation came to an end, the march proceeding all the while swiftly and cautiously. Half-an-hour’s walking under the guidance of Michel brought them to the spot where he suspected the presence of the enemy. It was a long, low farm-house, surrounded by a yard of considerable extent. The wall was irregular—in parts of considerable height; in others but a couple of feet or so. Standing by the lower part, the form of a sentry could be made out. Near him was another. They did not walk as usual, but stood, as it seemed, smoking and leaning on their arms. After a while their voices were heard, and Michel could perceive that they were conversing not with each other, but with men within the enclosure. This suggested the idea of a considerable force. None the less, Michel crept forward, then, with a spring, struck down the nearest sentry with his sword. The other, bewildered, was preparing for action when a blow from Michel’s musket levelled him to the earth. Meanwhile, Mike and the remainder of the party were in readiness to follow up this achievement with a general attack, when the plan was disconcerted. As the moblot saw Michel ad-

vance he started, 'Quiet, can't you?' said Mike. At the second blow, however, the blood of the fiery little Breton rendered him intoxicated; he dashed over, and, raising his rifle to his shoulder, blazed away into the midst of the group, the sound of whose conversation they had heard. The detonation of the piece rang out like thunder in the still night air. Within the farm-house the clatter of armed men hurrying could be heard; from the enclosure at least half-a-dozen shots were fired. Mike rushed to his little comrade, who had already mounted on the wall, grasped him round the waist, and drew him off. As he did so the bullets of a new volley rattled around Mike's head, but luckily did not touch him. Michel, vexed at the occurrence, but losing none of his coolness, passed the word to his party to fire and then scatter. They numbered in all but a dozen, but they had the advantage of knowing the situation of the enemy, and the volley they directed into the enclosure did considerable execution, notwithstanding its random character. The Germans fired furiously, but necessarily without aim. They feared to leave their shelter, such as it was, having no knowledge of the numbers who might be outside. Another volley added to their perplexity, and, as the French guessed from a pause, there was something like a consultation. Once more an ill-directed fire came from the yard.

'They seem wonderfully reduced in numbers,

judging by the shots,' said one of the men to Michel.

'I suspect they are getting into the house.'

A few moments proved the correctness of Michel's supposition. The fire from the enclosure ceased, but a terrific blaze came from the windows of the dwelling.

'Come, men,' said Michel, quietly, 'pass the word to retire; we have driven them into their fortress, and may leave them to count their casualties. Let us see how we stand.'

Withdrawing from the reach of a chance shot, Michel called over the little roll of his comrades. None was missing. When he came to the Mobile, he shook his head. 'Ah, friend,' he said, 'over-zeal is almost as bad as cowardice.'

'Wait a bit,' said Mike, 'he won't take long to learn the use of his weapon, for, by my faith, he is likely to be a very willing pupil.'

CHAPTER XV.

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.

‘WELL, Voss, you seem to bear a charmed life,’ said one of the group of soldiers and sous-officers who were discussing some of the events in which he had been concerned.

‘Not more so than most of my comrades, who expose themselves as much as I do.’

‘Ah, that can hardly be.’

‘But you are so rusé,’ said an admiring veteran of eighteen. ‘And then these Prussians seem such fools you can do what you like with them.’

‘Fools!’ said Michel. ‘Do you really believe that fools could have defeated French armies in the field, and have so hemmed us up here?’

‘My young friend,’ interposed Sergeant Mahony, ‘did you ever ride a steeple-chase?’

‘Qu’est ce que cela?’

‘Well, there it is, you see. A youth that hasn’t as much as seen Limberick races has a deal of wisdom to learn. But I hope you can understand this. If a race-horse—you know what that is, I hope——’

‘Parbleu, yes.’

‘Well, if a race-horse beats a cart-horse over a four mile course is it much for him to take a shine out of?’

‘Assuredly not.’

‘Well, if my friend Sergeant Michel Voss has been only circumventing fools, you see it is no mighty credit for him.’

Applause greeted Mike’s reasoning.

As the two men walked together that same afternoon, Michel observed to his friend, ‘‘You are quite right, Mike, in maintaining that these Prussians we have to deal with are no fools. Hitherto we have been very fortunate, but the enemy is everywhere on the alert, and will play us a trick if possible.’

‘I never suspected him of good intentions,’ remarked Mike.

‘No doubt. But it will not do to relax a single precaution. In fact, the farther we go on, and the more successful we have been, the more needed it will be that we should have an eye of perpetual watchfulness.’

‘In fact, one eye up the chimney, for fear of the soot, and another eye skimming the pot for fear of the grease?’

‘Exactly,’ answered Michel, who had a vague notion that his comrade meant to signify some very peculiar and even excessive caution.

That evening they left the fort with about the same number and nearly the same men as had

accompanied them in the expedition to Neuilly. This time, immediately after starting, Michel repeated his injunctions to caution. Their intention was to cross the river near Brie, where their first serious encounter with the Prussian cavalry had taken place. They advanced as usual, silently, Michel leading. The daylight had completely disappeared, but stars shone in the sky, and there was no difficulty in discovering objects at a moderate distance. Close by the river there runs a long hedge which is used to shelter the growth of a young plantation. As they approached this, Michel cast a rapid glance at it. 'A nice place for an ambuscade,' he thought. He had scarcely formed the idea in his head when a ball came whizzing by him, a second drew blood from his ear, and a third struck the peak of his kepi. Without a second's hesitation he flung himself on his face, and thought, 'There must be from the number of shots at least fifty men, and from the direction in which the balls go, they must have a rifle pit there.'

'Down,' he called in a low tone to his comrades.

'There's no necessity for saying that to poor Jean Gros,' muttered Mike in his comrade's ear, 'he has done it as natural as—death.'

'Draw back quietly off the road,' said Michel, 'the causeway will afford you a slight shelter, and then we can see what is the best to be done.'

They moved, still on face and hands, backwards, a new volley flying over their heads.

'If the beggars would only show up,' hissed the corporal in Mike's ear.

'They understand the consequences as well as you, mon ami.'

When they had got to the slight shelter which the inequality between the roadway and the tilled ground offered, it became apparent that three of their number were missing. This left but eleven rifles available.

'There is no chance of fighting them on these terms, but we must not allow ourselves to be driven off. It is only standing up you have any chance of hitting them. Rise up when I give the word, aim low, then drop down.'

The movement was executed with promptness, and was successful, in so far, that the return fire did no damage, though it consisted of a heavy volley. In a moment the little party had divided, and delivered a fire as if from the flanks of their previous position, and again they had separated and fired again. By this means they left the enemy in uncertainty as to their strength. Once again they closed opposite the rifle pit.

'Michel,' said Mike, 'our poor little moblot is one of those lying on the roadway.'

'Ah, I am sorry for the brave little man.'

'He is alive. I have heard him groaning. We must get him off.'

‘How is it to be done? Ha! I have it. I will get to the end of their pit, and fire down it. That will draw their attention on me. While they are firing, you may make a dash to carry him off.’

‘Right. That is the thing.’

The men had been in many a perilous adventure together, yet the gravity of this impressed them so seriously, that they spontaneously put out their hands and grasped each in a farewell clasp. But they made no further sign of the estimate in which they held it.

‘My shots away to the right—rifle first, revolver then—if possible—shall be your signal,’ said Michel as he crawled away.

From the rifle pit the firing had slackened. It seemed as if the enemy was waiting for a further development. Mike fancied in the darkness of the night that he saw a face peeping through the hedge. On the chance he fired. In all probability he had deceived himself, but the shot drew forth a renewed fire from the enemy, and kept them still within the protection of their pit. Meanwhile Michel had gone upon his toilsome journey. The irregularities of the ground, the obstacles which stood in his way, were cautiously availed of to avoid the possibility of discovery on the part of the foe and consequent failure, and he was at least a hundred yards from where he started before he ventured to cross the road. This he did upon

all fours. Arrived at the other side, he examined the ground closely. The hedge which protected the rifle pit ran in at right angles, so that it formed almost a fortification for the enemy. It grew thick and solid to a height of more than five feet. It would have been easy to scale a wall considerably higher, but this was an awkward obstacle. Looking closely, however, he perceived that near the ground the hedge was not perfect, and that there were openings here and there. While he was calculating the possibility of wriggling himself under he became aware of a movement at the other side. Quick as lightning the thought came into his head that the enemy were trying the converse of his movement, and intended to take his party in flank. The crackling of branches proved the truth of his conjecture, and presently, himself thoroughly concealed by an overhanging bush, he saw the helmet of a German soldier thrust through, to be followed by the body.

‘Hindurch?’ questioned a whispering voice inside.

‘Ja. Komm.’

And the first man stood erect, while his comrade crept into the hedge.

‘Now,’ thought Michel, and the naked blade was lifted, and the German struck down. Immediately the chassepot barrel was thrust under the hedge and fired down in the direction of the enemy. A

shot from the revolver settled the man creeping through, and the discharge of its five other chambers served to convey the notion of numbers. There was a momentary hesitation in the rifle pit, and then the musketry blazed out in sharp and rapid volleys.

'Now,' thought Mike to himself, as the report of Michel's first shot reached his ear, and with a rapid step he rushed upon the road, and, swinging the body of the little mobile on his shoulder, darted off. The confusion amongst the enemy at the supposed flank attack favoured his bold move, and he had a few seconds' grace after it was perceived. But the foe were prompt after all, and several shots were fired in his direction.

'But the nerves of the ruffians were shook,' said he as he lay down with his burden on the grass, 'for the devil a ball of them has touched me. I wish to God, though, Michel was here. How is this poor fellow? Let me see.'

Examining the mobile he found he had fainted.

'Now I've got him,' he muttered, 'I wonder what on earth I'm to do with him.'

There was no time, however, to consider. From the rifle pit the firing still continued heavy but comparatively harmless, the small party of assailants contriving to make their number appear more formidable than in reality it was. Mike took his share in this game, and was just on the ground

with his musket in his hand re-loading, when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

‘Mike!’

‘Michel!’

‘Thank God!’

‘Thank God!’

‘You have got the mobile?’

‘I have.’

‘There is nothing further to be done here—we must draw off. Our dead we must leave, but we can take away the wounded.’

With great circumspection the party drew from the deadly spot, the wounded man being carried between two. They were far on their road to the fortress before the enemy ventured from his cover.

‘Well, Michel,’ remarked Mike, ‘them Prussians did play us a trick, as you were expecting.’

‘They did.’

‘When is our turn to come?’

‘That is what I am considering.’

‘That rifle pit was an infernal invention.’

‘So it was. We must think of something to spoil it on them.’

‘No chance of occupying it before them?’

Michel shook his head.

‘Well now, wouldn’t it be a good thing to astonish them?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘They are pretty well used to bullets—why not try buck shot?’

‘Ha, we must do something. It seems to me like a disgrace to allow the bodies of our two poor fellows to lie there unburied.’

When they got to the fortress the wound of the mobile was examined and it was found to be severe.

Mike, who had taken a friendly interest in him since he was first placed under his charge, acted as assistant while the surgeon extracted the bullet from his leg, and as a willing if not over-skilful nurse when the operation was over. With his gay chat, too, he helped the poor fellow to forget his pain.

‘Where were you last night from me?’ said the wounded man next morning in rather a fretful tone.

‘Well, I was experimenting on the effects of pepper.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I suppose you haven’t forgotten our friends of the rifle pit?’

‘Of course I haven’t.’

‘To be sure. Even though the surgeon took away that little memorandum they inserted in your leg, I suppose you’d still not be insensible to their attentions.’

‘Go on—go on.’

‘Well, they were to be got out of that infernal rifle pit. This time, though, we didn’t go passing

by at the hall door, as we did the night you were there, but tried the kitchen, just as if we were members of the force with a weakness for the cook.'

'You mean you didn't take the high road.'

'Exactly. Michel took the back, and I the side opposite to the one where he startled them the night before. We weren't such fools, though, as to suppose they wouldn't be on the look-out. They were and ready for us. That is, they thought they were, but they made one mistake. "Load with buckshot," said Michel. Load we did. "All together, but with good aim, though—now." We fired, twenty of us. If you heard the buckshot rattling, 'twas as good as a shower of stones on a tent at Cappagh fair. It made a row amongst the bushes, it glanced off the trees, it whirled through the rifle pit in a way that made them fellows dance to a new tune. "Die mitrailleuse!" they roared out. "Give it to them again," called out Michel. At the second charge, par la gèle mortelle, they cleared out of the rifle pit, and we had it,' said Mike, ending his narrative with a burst of laughter.

'Michel is a wonderful man,' said the little mobile, with a sigh of admiration.

'He has brains, and pluck, and a good heart. Cheer up, mon petit, you will soon be able to put that leg of yours on the ground again, and follow Michel, and find out the scoundrel who interfered with your marching.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAPTURE OF AN ISLAND.

‘**T**HREE volunteers to fill the places of Jean Gros and Edmond Moray dead, and Felix Richard wounded.’

‘Here! Here!’ thirty voices at least answered.

‘Guillaume Paix—no, you are too big. A giant like you couldn’t be hidden.’

‘Ah, sergeant, when it comes to fighting, you would not find my size and strength inconvenient.’

‘We have so much more to do than fighting, you know. For the present I fear we must lose your services.’

The tall soldier turned away with an air of discontent.

‘I want good swimmers. Can you swim, Charles Marteau?’

The mobile addressed laughed, ‘I have been,’ he said, ‘three years an *attendant des bains* at Dieppe.’

‘Good, then you fall in. And you, Barbet?’

Barbet shook his head. ‘I cannot swim, but I will go anywhere with you on solid ground.’

‘That is right enough and I have no doubt of

your ardour. By-and-by your turn will come, I dare say, as we cannot hope there shall not be gaps in our ranks ; but for the present, comrade, I must have others.'

With such a spirit prevailing, the only difficulty being in selection, it is needless to say the other vacancies were quickly filled.

'I'm rather fond of bathing myself,' remarked Mike Mahony afterwards, confidentially to his friend. 'Many's the time Jimmy the Inkbottles caught me jumping to dry myself on the bank of the Shannon, and helped to save me from catching cold by tickling my back with a tidy little cane he used to carry. I am fond of a dive, and a float, and a spatter, and, indeed, of all the diversions that one can have in the water. And it's very thoughtful of you, Michel, to dream of providing such an innocent recreation as a bathing school for us poor fellows in this dull siege time. But isn't it late in the season for that sort of fun? Don't you think there ought be a kettle or two of hot water poured into the river there to make swimming a pleasure at this season of the year?'

'Of course, Mike, I understand your meaning. Yes, I have an idea in my brain.'

'And my long speech, with all its twists and turns, is a sort of corkscrew, I suppose, to draw it out of your head.'

'Mike, I want to capture an Island.'

‘By japers, if it was a peninsula here goes to join you.’

‘It will be probably a long job, and I think it better that we should reconnoitre the ground before we regularly make the attempt.’

The Marne, a tortuous river enough in its general course, runs tolerably straight from east to west as it passes Nogent. But near the village the bed of the river is cut by two long islands covered with trees and brushwood. The first is the Isle des Loups, and on it two arches of the railway viaduct rest. The other is named the Isle des Moulins. These two islands were then in the possession of the Prussians, and formed a dangerously advanced post. It was opposite these along the bank of the river that Michel and his companion made their observations.

‘Hum,’ observed Sergeant Mahony. ‘As I said, I can swim reasonably well, but I am afraid I couldn’t manage to carry the chassepot in my teeth, and without that I don’t see my way overclearly to capturing that island.’

‘Be patient. Resources always come with patience and thinking.’

‘Well, if I was thinking for ever—hold on, votre âme—what’s that over there?’

‘I told you,’ said Michel quietly, ‘by patience and thinking the means would be discovered.’

At the lower end of the Isle des Loups, which is the farther up stream of the two islands, there

stretches out a sand-bank, on the inner side of which a luxuriant gorse grows up to the proportions of a shrubbery. So thick and large is the screen it forms that with care it would be possible for a man to lie concealed against observation from the other parts of the island, provided attention were not aroused. On the other hand, this bank stretches towards the Isle des Moulins, to observation from which it is quite open, except that the view is somewhat impeded by the trees which grow on the island itself. But what fascinated the gaze of the adventurers was the gunwale of an old boat deeply imbedded in the sand. Here was the means of carrying out the projected attack.

With a rapid survey of the situation Michel laid aside the chassepot and revolver which he habitually carried with him, retaining by his side only the sword.

‘Michel,’ said Mike, ‘after all it was I discovered the boat first——’

‘Sergeant Mahony,’ said Michel with a smile, ‘you are under orders. See, Mike, I must go. Watch me here. If a sentry should discover me, your rifle might stop his tongue, and beside divert attention to this side.’

‘All right.’

Stepping cautiously down the bank, Michel plunged into the stream, anxiously followed by the eyes of his comrade. The distance from the

shore was about thirty yards, and this the swimmer easily accomplished. He landed on the sand-bank, and went towards the boat. Mike, observing his movements closely, saw him seize the bow, tug and strain with all his might, but vainly. The little craft was too deeply imbedded to be stirred by his single strength, powerful as that was. When his efforts were shown to be clearly futile, he came again to the edge of the sand-bank and swam to shore.

‘So you have failed, my poor friend.’

‘Not altogether. I have found out that their watch there is not very effective. On the whole I am not sorry that I did not succeed in moving the boat. There are no oars, and I should not have known what to do with her. Perhaps she would have drifted away down the stream and been lost to us.’

They returned to the fortress. Michel communicated his ideas to the commandant, and not only received a warm permission to employ his own volunteers in the task he proposed, but also the promise that a considerable covering force would be despatched to aid if necessary in his operations. Without loss of time the expedition proceeded to the spot Michel and Mike had left a short time before.

‘Would not your object be more safely achieved at night?’ asked the corporal.

‘The darkness will favour us, no doubt, once

we have got the boat, but it will need some light to manage to get at it.'

The twilight had begun to descend. Michel, who had lost no time in making his arrangements, the moment he arrived at the river bank plunged without hesitation into the stream, having around his waist a rope, the other end of which was retained on shore. He was followed immediately by Mike, who admitted to himself he thought it droll to be going for a swim without a 'leap off,' and a shriek; and close after him came Marteau, the Dieppe bathing attendant. When the three men landed the work of raising the boat was found to be feasible, though even to them difficult. After being raised it had to be cleaned of sand, the rope which Michel had brought with him made fast to the bow, and then the little bark committed to the water it had so long abandoned. All this must be done while a sentry of the enemy was marching to and fro, his walk bringing him at every minute to within twenty feet of where they stood. By dint of patient labour the task was at last accomplished. The boat, a crazy old thing, but with no fatal gaps in her planks, was floating on the stream, a rope from her bow communicating with the shore, and another made fast to a stout furze stem, so that she might be pulled back again. At a signal from Michel the shore line was hauled upon and the boat brought rapidly across the river. The occupants immediately re-

possessed themselves of their arms, and taking three other men with them—rather more than a safe load for the creaking old craft—the boat was worked by means of the rope attached to the island. As they sprang ashore, the sentry, who had possibly been thinking of the *Allerliebste* away in Thuringia, at last awakened to the bewildering fact that the French were absolutely on the island. He fired, less with the notion of hitting any of the adventurers than as a signal. They made no reply, as their object was to get under shelter from the probable fire of the other island, and they wanted to place gorse and brushwood between them and the force below. There were three Germans, of whom our Thuringian sentry was one, on the Isle des Loups. On the side of the island which faced the left bank of the river, then to a considerable extent occupied by the Germans, there was a boat. Into this the flying sentry dashed followed by his companions. They never reached the shore. The rifles of the Frenchmen were too deadly in their aim, and the boat floated idly down the stream, bearing a ghastly burden. In the mean time from the Isle des Moulins came a sharp quick fire, without the advantage of aim, however, the Frenchmen having judiciously concealed themselves.

‘Come,’ said Michel, lifting a spade which had formed part of the cargo of his boat, ‘we must have a rifle pit, or some of these bullets will find us.’

‘What’s the name of this?’ said Mike taking up another.

‘Une bêche.’

‘Well now, some people I know, if they heard you say that, would think you were a deceitful character.’

‘Why so?’

‘Because you wouldn’t call a spade a spade.’ And Mike chuckled, partly at his own joke, partly at the bewildered look of his comrade, who had not the faintest comprehension of his meaning.

‘You can use it of course?’

‘If I could handle a pen and ink as well, I’d be—I’d be—faith may be it’s transported I’d be. Many a fellow got spoiled by being too well educated that way.’

Mike’s hands went as quick as his tongue, and before long the men had hollowed out a respectable rifle pit facing the Isle des Moulins. This did not content Michel, who set to work at another facing the left bank of the river. He had his works nearly executed when another and then another batch of men came to join him by the boat. Nor was he idle as regarded attack any more than defence. A vigorous fire was kept up on the island from his side, while a cross fire from the right bank annoyed the Prussians.

When the trench work was concluded, Mike Mahony declared that it was like going home to the barony of Clanwilliam again, and somehow

French life seemed to agree with him better. On the whole he thought he preferred the chassepot to the spade. Expressing which sentiment, he took up his rifle, and cast his eyes about him for the best way to use it. At the extremity of the Isle des Loups, opposite to that of the Isle des Moulins, there grows a giant oak. The stem is on the very edge of the island, and three of its branches project far over the water. The largest of these again spreads into three smaller. Mike, observing this tree with great attention, climbed up the trunk, and then crawled along the branch to the point of its separation, which was nearly fifteen feet from the stem. Here he was not more than thirty paces distant from the other island. The forking of the stem formed a protection for his head, and between the branches he rested his chassepot. It was now night, but clear and starlight. Watching keenly he perceived behind a tree upon the nearest shore of the other island a dark form. The movements soon became unmistakable—he was a sharp-shooter about to fire. Mike drew trigger and the dark object fell. Before long it was replaced by another. Mike tried his hand again, but this time he failed. It now became a combat between the two, for the situation of Mike's perch soon made itself apparent. Bullet after bullet sped between them without more injury save to the trees which formed their shelter, but, before the morning dawned, a third

German had to take the dangerous post behind the trunk on the Isle des Moulins.

‘Come down, Mike, your turn of duty is over.’

‘Wait a few minutes. There’s a Prussian here I want to say good-bye to if he’ll only give me the opportunity.’

‘Come down; time is up. You ought to have had enough for one night.’

When Mike reluctantly descended in obedience to the injunctions of his comrade, it was seen that the bark of the tree where he rested was absolutely torn to pieces with bullets.

‘Uncommon good shots some of these German ruffians are,’ he observed, as he saw his friend remarking the evidences of the conflict.

There was a paleness which no peril of his own could produce on the cheek of Michel, ‘That was a fearful post you occupied,’ he said.

‘Oh, no,’ said Mike coolly. ‘Of course, if you dozed there, the chances are you’d tumble into the water, but, you see, them bullets were capital things to keep the sleep out of your eyes.’

CHAPTER XVII.

A PENITENT.

TOWARDS the latter end of October an attempt was made to vary the monotony of siege life in Paris by re-opening one or two of the theatres which had been closed. It was but a dismal sort of relief at the best. The crowds of spectators were rather spiritless; the actors and actresses found their parts difficult for the first time. They eschewed the theatrical wardrobe, as if there was something of mockery of the time in the gaudy trappings of classical or mediæval life, and they presented their Polyeuctes and Sganarelles in ordinary walking costume. It is difficult to comprehend how much the clothing of the part has to do with its spirit, and what a difference there is in the performer who feels that he looks every inch a king, and him who has to depend for majesty on his native dignity of carriage. Titus in pantaloons—Horatius in a tweed suit! As well send for a tailor for the Apollo Belvidere.

Two ladies were leaving the Théâtre Français one afternoon after the performance of a comedy

of Molière. One was an actress whose name was famous not only in France but in Europe; the other was a leader in the *haut monde*, a countess, a blue, and one who had hitherto been distinguished for the careless gaiety of her life.

‘Mademoiselle,’ said the Countess, addressing her companion by a name for which we shall substitute that of Céline, ‘how you did charm me in the part of Dorinde.’

‘Ah, Countess, you flatter. I once could act it, I know, but now——’

‘Well, to be candid, I do confess I have seen you more brilliant, though I assure you I have been charmed——’

‘Countess, you are very good, but your kindness cannot persuade me that my acting was more than tolerable. How is it possible that one can enter thoroughly into the conception that you are Dorinde, when you see your Alceste in excellent M. Bontemps’ handsome wig and padded coat? But it is not that only.’

‘What then?’

‘Ah, that horrible green room!’

‘The green room? What is the matter with that?’

‘Countess, I was not aware of what our people had intended—they forgot to tell me—but when I walked in to-day as usual, turning over my part in my mind, stretched out on an ottoman before me was a corpse. I started with affright and

turned away, when, behold, there were two more with their ghastly eyes staring into mine.'

'What a horror!'

'With that recollection fresh in my mind, you will not wonder that I found it difficult to do justice to the sprightliness of Dorinde.'

'But was this some *mauvaise plaisanterie*? If so it is enough to make one feel outraged.'

'No, no. It was mere forgetfulness not to have informed me. The hospital in the convent here is gorged with sick and wounded, and we had resolved to turn our theatre into an ambulance. It is not quite prepared yet, but the nuns were compelled to use their mortuary as a ward for patients, and they desired immediate accommodation such as we could give them. Their dead house was emptied of its tenants, who had just been transferred to our green room before I entered it.'

'How shocking.'

'Ah, the first shock over, I am not sorry for it, as I intend to become a nurse, and it is as well to get accustomed at once to the worst. I was just going into the convent to learn something of the duties.'

'You to become a nurse!'

'Of what other use am I now, Countess? At a time like this my art seems to me contemptible.'

'You are a noble creature, Céline. I too have had thoughts of volunteering.'

'You are right, Countess. Art and fashion

must give way to bandages. Will you come into the convent with me ?’

‘Willingly.’

They entered a large gloomy building near which their conversation had been carried on. On enquiry for the superior they were introduced to that lady, who wore the costume of the Order of Charity. She manifested neither surprise nor emotion of any kind at the mention of their names, though they would have made the profoundest sensation in any salon in Paris. The designation of the brilliant actress was totally unknown to her, it having risen on the world after the nun’s departure from it ; that of the Countess was familiar. But already the highest and noblest in France—especially those of the legitimist houses—had placed their titles on the roll of nurses in the hospitals.

‘You desire,’ she said, in a matter of fact tone, ‘to aid in our hospital ?’

‘Yes.’

‘It is a worthy and Christian thought. Have you had any experience ?’

‘None.’

‘That is to be regretted, but it can be got over. But, pardon me, mesdames, if I speak plainly. This task of ours is grave—nay, awful. Inexperience is comparatively nothing. Educated, intelligent women can acquire very rapidly knowledge enough to be useful—provided you have

taken up your determination in earnest, and with proper motives.'

'Madame la Supérieure,' said the actress, 'I am sincerely anxious to do something to alleviate the sufferings of the brave men who are defending our country, and you need have no fear that I will shrink from any duty it may involve.'

'Your motive is a good one, madame, though there is yet a higher.'

'Madame,' said the Countess, with something of the quick *effusion* of her nature. 'I place myself in your hands. In the present hour my past life shocks me with its levity, and I would gladly do something for the aid of my fellow-creatures.'

'Ladies,' said the Superior, 'it is not a time for me to discuss, but your action in this, as in all other things, ought to be directed to the glory of God. I believe, however, your occupation here will teach you more than my poor words. Come, I will place you under the instruction of a lay-woman like yourself, who has had but a short experience, but whose good will and intelligence have made her one of our most valued assistants.'

They rose to proceed to the wards.

'Stay,' said the nun, 'I must observe, this girl is not of your rank. She is in fact but a peasant. Remember, however, that you must accept her directions without considering that you, madame, are a Countess, and you, mademoiselle, I have no doubt equally illustrious.'

‘Far more so—’ the Countess was proceeding to say when the actress interrupted her friend.

‘Madame la Supérieure, have no fear that we shall consider ourselves as anything but ignorant pupils learning from a competent instructress.’

The Superior proceeded from the apartment where they sat to a large ward which had once formed the refectory of the convent, but was now occupied by between fifty and sixty beds. Two nuns in the dress of their order were moving about, busied in attending to the patients. There were beside some other women habited in black, and engaged in similar duties. ‘These,’ whispered the nun, ‘are ladies of the world like yourselves, who have come into this place to tend the suffering soldiers.’ They passed on to near the end of the room.

‘Annette Beaune,’ called the nun.

‘I am here, Madame la Supérieure,’ replied a soft voice from the head of one of the pallets.

‘Come hither, child. These ladies are anxious to help in the wards, but they have not yet been accustomed to the duty. Aid them to learn what they have to know.’

Annette bowed.

‘Who is that patient you are engaged with?’

‘The Alsatian—Marc Rapp.’

‘Ha, I know.’ The nun had been informed of Annette’s story.

‘What have you been doing for him?’

‘I wish, madame, you would come with me and hear him.’

The Superior assented, and they approached the bed where the sufferer lay. It was but too evident that for him the end of earthly trouble was not far off. Pain had set its seal upon his pallid brow, and his body was wasted away until it had become little better than an animated corpse. The broken ribs from which he suffered might have been set and cured, but the bones had injured vital organs, and his case was hopeless. In attending on him Annette had to struggle against a moral repugnance even more violent than the physical horror which the first sight of wounds inspired; but she was brave enough to be a Christian, and no patient in the ambulance or in the hospital was more assiduously cared for than this man, whose nurse believed that his restoration to health and strength would be an almost inevitable pledge of misfortune to herself. But before very long this apprehension was dispelled by the verdict of the surgeons. Annette trembled lest the intelligence should bring joy to her heart. In effect it caused her to redouble her assiduity. She sought not only to smooth the sufferer’s path to the grave, but to awaken his conscience, and stimulate him to prepare for the life to come. To her astonishment, her task in this respect was far less difficult than she expected. In truth the man’s nature was healthy and

whirled along by the tide of strong pas
Now that these passions had subsided with
decay of his vital force, he was able to see
their true light the actions of which he had
guilty. Annette's first approaches to the su
at her heart were received with a sullenness
did not surprise her. But before she had
time to feel discouraged, she was startled, in
of the pauses of the conversation, to hear
brief—still sulkily spoken words—‘you
Joyfully interpreting the brief indication, Ar
hastened for the chaplain, who was always c
spot, and who, alas, was being always need
shrive the parting soul. At the time whe
nun called Annette, the now reconciled pe
seemed about to unburden his mind of some l
weight. When she approached the bed, in
pany with the Superior, a flash of impatien
up his dull eyes, and he signalled that he
something to say to her. After a few mo
he said, but with many pauses, ‘My life has
evil—my actions evil. The instrument o
vengeance has been the instrument of my pr
ment. The influence of a corrupt cousin en
me to drive’—here the pause was longer
usual, as if the speaker found a difficul
bringing himself to utter the name—‘M
Voss into the army. It also enabled me

into the commissariat, where I meet my death like a crushed worm. I had no need to go there, but I was driven—by the instigation of the devil? by the judgment of God? I know not. But my design was ill.’ Again a pause. ‘I can now thank God with a full heart that my intention has been defeated even at the cost of my life.’ Once more the speaker paused, less from lack of power to converse than in thought. ‘Annette, you have forgiven me?’

‘I have, indeed,’ said the girl with tears in her eyes.

‘I knew you would. But there is something more.’

‘Oh, tell me, and if it is possible I will endeavour to gratify you.’

‘I want to see Michel Voss.’

‘God help me!’ ejaculated the sorrowful Annette.

‘I want to ask his forgiveness. I want him to take this hand—the hand of the arm that was broken—you remember when—and to say that he forgives me.’

‘But, oh, Marc, where I am to find him I know not. Alas, alas—but he may be already among the slain.’

The eyes of the sick man grew wild with light, and a flush came upon his brow.

‘Tell him to come,’ he muttered.

The quick eye of the nun saw that the mind of

the patient, too much excited for his weak state by the conversation, was beginning to wander.

‘Michel Voss,’ he said to himself in low accents.

On a sign from the nun, Annette said to him soothingly, ‘I will bring him to you as soon as I can.’

He only continued to murmur the name of the man he had once regarded as his enemy.

‘Oh, where—where shall I find him?’ said Annette, wringing her hands. The desire of her heart had become intensified with a new agony.

‘Pray, my child, and trust in Providence,’ said the nun. Turning to the new nurses, who had been interested and wondering spectators of this scene, she said, ‘Ladies, trust me you may learn more from that young peasant girl than how to make bandages or administer a medicine.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

NOUS SOMMES TRAHIS.

‘**Y**OUR business?’ said a saucy laquy to a soldier who stood at the entrance door of the Ministry of War.

‘To see the Minister.’

‘You!’

‘Yes, by appointment. Sergeant Voss.’

‘What is that chatter?’ called out a voice from within.

‘Here is a soldier insists on seeing M. le Ministre. Sergeant Voss he calls himself.’

‘And why did you not admit him, animal? Come,’ said the smart young secretary, ‘this way.’

Michel passed through a crowd of expectants who were in waiting for an interview with the great man. All sorts of schemes, all sorts of petitions, all manner of remonstrance, all kinds of hope and fear and distrust and resentment were represented in that ante-chamber. Republican as things had become, and poor as the siege was making most people in Paris, the laquy still

felt bribes jingling in his pocket. The crowd looked curiously as the official, who was absolutely next in importance to the great man, led a mere sergeant of the line through the salon. Michel, notwithstanding his habitual aplomb, felt no slight embarrassment as he saw himself the object of so many curious eyes. Arrived at the private door of the Minister, they were admitted sans façon, but, to the astonishment of both, the secretary received a polite intimation to retire.

‘You are Sergeant Voss?’

‘Yes, Monsieur le Ministre.’

‘You have been engaged in many adventures?’
You are not tired of them? You can be faithful even to death?’

To each of these questions Michel responded with a bow.

‘Well,’ continued the Minister, ‘I have one for you to undertake probably more perilous than any you have yet attempted, and undoubtedly of the greatest gravity. It is to convey a dispatch to Marshal Bazaine at Metz.’

‘I am ready to set out on the spot, monsieur.’

‘But how do you propose to accomplish it? How can you succeed?’

‘Already I think I see my way, but I shall understand better as I go along. I know something of the country about Metz——’

‘But there are the German lines around Paris,’ interrupted the Minister.

‘Bah—a spider’s web. The real difficulty is the Moselle. I shall swim it.’

‘You are a daring fellow. And what reward do you expect for this?’

‘Nothing, monsieur.’

‘Nothing. Pooh—that cannot be. If you succeed you shall have the rank of an officer.’

‘Monsieur, I do not care to be an officer.’

‘Le diable! What then shall we do for you?’

Michel paused a moment. ‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘the only reward I will ask is that you drive out of the country these accursed invaders, who have desolated my home, and laid France in ruins.’

‘Brave garçon,’ said the Minister. ‘We shall do our best to fulfil your wish; but should we be fortunate enough to do so, rest assured that I will not be content with the modest reward for you that you measure out for yourself.’

‘Thanks, monsieur. But when am I to set out?’

‘Ah, that is the question I cannot answer. My dispatch depends on the receipt of one from Metz, which I expect hourly. You must wait until I have received that, but you must also be ready to start at the moment I receive it. Stay, I will have a pallet made up for you here in my bureau, so that no time may be lost.’

‘I shall be ready.’

‘In any case I do not expect the dispatch be-

fore evening. Till then you are free to dispose of yourself.'

'Are there any German prisoners in Paris, monsieur?'

'Not many,' said the Minister with a sigh. 'About a hundred. They are at La Roquette. Do you know where that is?'

'No, monsieur, and I find it rather harder to make my way through this great city than I fancy I would to Metz.'

'Never mind, I will have a person sent with you. You have the idea of extracting information from the prisoners, I suppose.'

'Precisely, monsieur. I am an Alsatian, and speak German.'

'Ah, très bien. Here is a note to the governor of the prison who will give you every facility. Do not be later on your return than nine o'clock this evening.'

With these directions Michel withdrew, and, guided by a servant of the Minister, he was soon at the gate of the vast prison. The letter of the Minister was a passport to immediate compliance with his wishes, and before half-an-hour elapsed he had exchanged his military uniform for the costume of a gardien. Michel had vaguely heard amongst his companions of the hardships which French soldiers had to suffer in German prisons, and he expected to find proportionate misery amongst the Germans who had fallen into French

hands, especially as already the inhabitants of the city were beginning to feel the pinching effects of the siege. To his astonishment he found that they were as well treated as the men of his own corps. He commenced his self-assumed duties just as the prisoners were at their mid-day meal, and he could not help contrasting the supply of wine, soup, meat, and bread, with what, as he had heard, many French citizens of considerable station outside were obliged to put up with.

‘Ein gutes Mahl, mein Freund,’ said he to a broad, fair-haired Saxon, who had just accomplished the end of his ration.

‘Ja—Bist du Deutscher?’

‘Nein, Elsasser.’

‘Ach,’ and the Saxon seemed to consider the conversation ended.

‘Rauchst du, Bruder?’

‘Gott im Himmel, Ja,’ he cried with an animation that no one would have hitherto credited him with.

‘Try a cigar, then,’ said Michel, continuing to converse in German.

The Saxon darted on it as a famished wolf on a prey. ‘Now I have you,’ thought Michel to himself. ‘How did you come in here?’ he asked, lighting up a cigar in true comrade fashion.

‘Captured one night when I was sentry.’

‘By whom?’

‘I do not know, French I suppose.’

‘Who was your commander?’

‘Oberst Ofingen.’

‘I mean who was the general of the corps?’

‘How do I know? The King—the Prince—somebody, I suppose.’

‘Ah, I suppose so,’ said Michel moving away.

‘There’s a cigar lost. I might as well look for information from the pig he got his last sausage out of.’

He tried a Bavarian with his polite attentions. The Bavarois was far more lively and more grateful, but his knowledge was scarcely greater than that of his comrade.

‘Oh, yes, I am belonging to the army of the Crown Prince.’

‘Which Crown Prince?’

‘Ah, it does not matter. My captain was Count Gutleben—the Herr Graf from our dorf you know.’

Michel distributed his cigars very freely, and obtained popularity though he could not get information. Once he found himself questioned in turn. A sharp-looking native of Breslau, with a clear olive complexion, having affected to answer frankly all Michel’s questions, put on an air of *bonne camaraderie* and remarked pleasantly,

‘You are fond of talking with Germans.’

‘Oh, yes. I am an Alsatian, you know, and have been always used to speaking your language.’

Then with a keen look the Breslauer said,

'Ah, it is easy to see you have been a soldier yourself.'

'He suspects me,' thought Michel to himself. 'A soldier,' he answered, assuming the most pompous air in the world, 'a soldier! I should think so, friend. Six months in the mobiles of Sud-Nord ought to make a man a soldier if anything could. I'll tell you what, comrade,' said Michel lowering his mouth to the ear of the German, and putting on an air of mysterious importance, 'as you are a prisoner I don't mind saying it to you, but if a certain person, who now wears the humble dress of a gardien de la maison in the prison of La Roche, were in command of one single French corps, Paris would not now be in a state of siege.' And Michel tapped his forehead with great solemnity, looking steadily into the eye of his questioner.

'Ah, I see, I have no doubt whatever of it,' said the German, turning away to hide a laugh.

'What a fool I was,' thought he, 'to suspect that conceited ass. An animal like that could never have played the tricks of the Franc-Tireur.'

'I wonder what does he suspect?' reflected Michel. 'He meant something, I am sure, but I flatter myself he has not been much enlightened.'

The sum of Michel's information obtained at the prison was not much, but he consoled himself with the thought that his time had to be occupied

somehow. At nine o'clock he presented himself at the bureau of the Minister, and again saw the General himself.

'No news yet, Sergeant,' said he, 'retire to rest.'

'I shall be ready at any moment you please to call me, Monsieur le Ministre.'

'Have you your arms?'

'I shall take no arms with me, monsieur.'

'How?'

'I shall attire myself as a peasant.'

'But if you are caught in peasant's dress with the dispatch upon you, they will shoot you as a spy.'

Michel shrugged his shoulders. 'If, monsieur, I am so maladroit as to let them catch me, I shall deserve to be shot.'

'You are a hero. Go to rest.'

Michel, habituated to fatigue and anxiety, slept soundly, but woke early. At his rising he was puzzled to know what to do with himself. He would not presume to disturb the Minister, or even any of the lesser personages attached to the establishment, and he remained a sort of prisoner while the dull grey of the sunrise expanded into the broad light of early morning, and went over the dial to nine. At that hour he received the long-expected summons, and went to meet it with a beating heart. When he entered, the General was alone, and Michel's keen eye was quick to see

that a great change had passed over him. His face was gloomy, his eyes rested on the ground, and with a fevered hand he stroked the short white beard which grew from his chin.

‘Sergeant,’ he said impetuously, as soon as he saw Michel appear, ‘your mission is ended—you do not go.’

‘Monsieur——’

‘No, no,’ he said, anticipating Michel’s question, ‘it is no doubt, no distrust of you.’

‘But, monsieur——’

‘Go, go; it is all ended—all ended.’

Michel feared to question any further, and turned to depart.

‘Stay, Sergeant Voss,’ said the old statesman and soldier collecting himself. ‘I have said it is not your fault. This also I say, if ever I have need of a trusty, energetic man for such a service as this I designed to put you on, I will look for you.’

‘I am profoundly grateful, M. le Ministre,’ said Michel bowing low, and he left the apartment.

He went out into the street, bewildered, and not knowing precisely in what direction he should first turn. As he moved along he saw groups of excited people standing at street corners, talking, gesticulating, and shouting. Unaccustomed to the vivacity of a city crowd he found at first great difficulty in understanding what was the occasion of the commotion. He could catch such phrases

as 'it is true,' 'it is not,' 'it is a lying Prussian invention,' 'it is a Bonapartist canard.'

'What is the news?' said Michel to one of the bystanders.

The man looked at him with a curious expression.

'Is it that you do not know?' said he.

'I do not,' answered Michel.

'Metz has capitulated!'

'Nous sommes trahis!' went up the roar from the crowd.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRAYER HEARD.

MICHEL was half prepared for the disastrous intelligence which set the crowd swaying and surging before him. The abrupt change in the plan of the Minister of War indicated to him that an event of moment, and that not of a gratifying character, had occurred. He received the news therefore with gravity, indeed, but without any of the apparent excitement that filled the minds of those around him.

‘You take it with great sang froid,’ observed the man who had first made the announcement to him, and who looked at Michel with a keen, suspicious glance. He was a workman of the lowest type, whose pale features were marked alike by misery and dissipation.

‘And yet it is dreadful news,’ said Michel simply.

The workman burst into a mocking laugh. ‘Here is a Paris hero who is good enough to think the treachery of Bazaine dreadful news.’

Michel moved away, as he had no desire to be mixed up in an altercation, when his eye lighted

amongst the crowd on a face he knew. It was that of a wood-cutter from the eastern district of Alsace, whose acquaintance Michel had made when in chase of game on the mountains. All at once memories of home rushed upon his mind, and he found himself far away from the crowded streets and turbulent mob of Paris, and conversing in the German which was more familiar than French to the rude mountaineer. 'Brandt, Brandt,' he called out, 'Erinnerst du nicht meiner ?'

It was an unlucky impulse which led him to call out thus. The words had scarcely escaped from his lips when the workman, fixing his dark eyes on him, bellowed 'I thought so.'

'What, what ?' cried out a hundred voices.

'Un Prussien !'

Then arose as if by magic the cry so frequent, so terrible, so often fatal, 'Espion.' The crowd had swelled with each passing second, and now grew to be of considerable dimensions. Michel, while internally cursing his own rashness in the employment of German maintained his coolness, and met the accusation with an indignant denial. 'Do you not see my uniform ? I am a Frenchman, an Alsatian, and I have spoken to my countryman who is also from Alsace.'

Brandt, who was separated from him by a few feet, recognized Michel's voice, and called out a confirmation of his friend's assertion. But unfortunately his accents were drowned in the rising

clamour. 'He is a spy.' 'Take him to prison.' 'Drown him,' was roared aloud. Michel, still cool, quietly stepped back to the wall of a house, and looked steadily in the faces of his assailants. The hostile cries mounted still higher, but there was something in the look of the man which made most shrink from being the first to lay hands on him. He had no arms with him, his intention having been to change his uniform for the dress of a peasant, but, even unarmed as he was, there was no difficulty in predicting evil to the one who commenced the assault. The problem was solved by a woman. A hag, old and ugly as those who in Paul Delaroche's picture yell at Marie Antoinette, dashed forward with a shrill cry, and knocked Michel's kepi off with a blow of her lean hand. She was a fierce, unsexed harriidan—without a trace of womanhood in her but its weakness. To Michel, however, she was a woman, and he would not strike—scarcely sought to hinder her. But in the violence of a mob it is only the first step which gives pause. There was a shout and then a rush, and in a moment a hundred hands were striking at Michel. It was no easy task, however, for the assailants. In their eagerness they struck each other, and those near him paid a heavy penalty in the blows they received from the strong Alsatian arm. But this could not last. The mere weight of the crowd was telling, and already his bare head was

bleeding from the stroke of a cane which had laid open his temple. A few seconds longer, and the chances were he would have fallen, and then his doom was sealed, when the regular tramp of armed men was heard, and in a moment the mob were parting like divided waters.

‘What is this?’ cried the officer in charge.

‘Lieutenant Brantome,’ cried Michel, who had now shaken off the few who ventured to hold him.

‘Great Heavens, Voss! Sergeant! What is the meaning of this?’

‘Nothing,’ said Michel, who had already recovered his aplomb, ‘except that these messieurs have been amusing themselves mauling me as a Prussian spy.’

‘Citizens,’ cried out the ardent young officer, ‘you ought to blush to think you have thus ill-treated one of the bravest and best soldiers in the French army.’

Behind the detachment there was an ambulance which now came up. It was in charge of a sergeant, who rushed frantically from his post, and grasping Michel firmly by the hand, called out wildly, ‘Is it you, is it you, Michel, they have struck? Show me a dozen of the ruffians that did it,’ and Sergeant Mahony looked round with a thirst for fight in his eyes such as no trooper ever showed for a pot of porter. But the crowd had already begun to slink away, and dispersed rapidly.

'You are wounded, Sergeant,' said the lieutenant. 'We are taking an ambulance waggon to the hospital near; you had better come and have your wound dressed.'

'It is nothing, monsieur,' said Michel, upon whom, however, the loss of blood already began to tell.

'Folly,' said the lieutenant. 'I order you to come. It is not far and you can walk.'

'Walk, I should think I can,' said Michel, and he stepped out resolutely. But though the distance was but a hundred yards, his tread grew feebler, and it needed the arm of his loving comrade to bring him to the gate of the Convent.

The surgeon, who passed in the cases, decided that Michel's hurt, though requiring attention, was not serious. He bade him go into a little side apartment, while he attended to the severely wounded whom it was necessary to send into the wards. Michel, accompanied by Mike, proceeded to the apartment pointed out to them. The bleeding still continued, and his paleness and feebleness began to grow to such a degree that his impatient comrade could not bear to stand by and see nothing done for him. Ignorant of the locality, he walked to the door opposite him, and without knocking pushed in. He found himself in presence of a Sister of Charity.

'What do you want?' said the nun, looking up from a desk at which she was seated.

'A glass of brandy, madame,' said Mike, thinking only of the urgent need of his friend.

For a moment it crossed the mind of the religious that she had to do with a drunken soldier who had wandered into the hospital, but a second glance showed that this supposition was incorrect. Still there was some sternness in her aspect as she bade him explain himself.

Mike, who in his excitement felt that he had been almost rude to a personage whom he would not dream of insulting, commenced an elaborate apology, 'But oh, madame,' he continued, 'my poor—my brave—my noble comrade is bleeding away for want of some help.'

'I will go and see him,' briefly said the nun, who was still a little puzzled by Mike's accent and manner.

When she entered the room Michel was reclining on a chair, with his head lying back. He had fainted. The nun stepped rapidly up to him and inspected the wound closely. After a pause, she raised her head, and said to Mike, who had been watching her with feverish anxiety, 'There is nothing serious the matter with your comrade. He has merely fainted from loss of blood. I will send assistance.' After her departure it seemed to Mike as if hours were passing, but only ten minutes had elapsed when a light step was heard in the passage, and a young girl habited in black

appeared, bearing a glass, and some linen. Mike rose and made his best bow.

‘It is your comrade,’ she said, ‘who is wounded? Ah——,’ and a low shriek of pain came from her lips, as she caught sight of the blood-stained countenance. She staggered, and putting one hand to her heart was barely able to lay the glass on a small table that stood near.

Mike bewildered had begun to say, ‘Are you sick, ma’am?’ when the girl suddenly recovering rushed over and threw herself on her knees at the feet of the insensible soldier, sobbing, ‘My darling, my darling, oh, it is thus I dreamed, I dreamed that I would see you.’

The confusion of Mike’s ideas was not unnaturally increased by this proceeding, when at last a flash passed across his mind, and he said to the girl,

‘Oh, I see it all, now. You are——’

‘I am Annette Beaune.’

If it were not for his recent interview with the nun and a certain impression of awe it had left upon his mind, Mike would probably have sent a whoop through the building that might have gone near to rousing the inhabitants of the dead house; as it was, he confined himself to grasping Annette by the hand, and exclaiming, ‘Oh, Miss Annette, there’s no need of brandy or bandages now. By my soul the sight of you will set his head right—and his heart too, for the matter of

that. Poor Michel, how many a bitter time he has been telling me his fear that he would never see you again.'

Annette did not long suffer her outburst of feeling to interfere with the discharge of her function. Taking with loving tenderness the dear head into her arms, she deftly and quickly bound up its wounds and then kissed the pale lips before her as innocently and with as little sense of shame as if they were those of a child she was nursing. After administering the stimulant to her patient she watched with anxiety the return of consciousness. But a few moments' waiting was needed. Michel's eyes opened, and he gazed steadily into the face of Annette who was kneeling at his feet.

'Am I awake?' he asked softly.

'Oh, Michel, my love, my dear spouse, do you not know me?'

Discretion was not considered the leading feature in the character of Monsieur Mahony, but here he displayed a remarkable proof to the contrary, for he slipped out of the apartment into the main hall, having found suddenly occasion in his capacity of sergeant to inspect the clearing of the ambulance cart. He thus lost sundry love exchanges which were very interesting to those concerned, but, as he remarked to himself, would set him thinking of Lizzie Connell, and the letter she never answered—confessing, however, that,

as he left Chalons two days after he wrote it, the failure might not have been her fault. 'I shouldn't wonder,' he reflected to himself, 'if some of them Germans got hold of it and read it. — There's one thing certain, I would like to catch the fellow that did. As sure as I'm a sinner—and glory be to God there isn't much doubt of that anyhow—Jimmy the Inkbottles never gave me such a thrashing for my reading as I'd give him for that.'

'Annette,' said Michel to his affianced, 'did you give me up for lost? Did you think of some other and more fortunate lover to replace me?'

There was a shy but confident smile in the girl's face as she looked up into that of the questioner. 'You do not seriously ask me, Michel, if I thought of any other than you? I know you do not. It never occurred to me,' she said simply, 'that I need fear your forgetting or deserting me, even though you had seen much prettier maidens.'

Here there was an interruption, and a protestation sealed upon the lips of the speaker.

'But I have suffered, dear Michel. Often and often I have dreaded you lost. At first when your father and my poor mother were taken away from me, my grieved heart seemed to be partly consoled with the idea that you at least would come back to me. But as the first shock of their fate grew lighter, it seemed as if my apprehensions about you grew more terrible. At night in my

dreams I have seen you,' and she shuddered as she spoke, 'in such awful ways—now a corpse, now wounded, now sick and uncared for. Ah, I cannot bear to think of it yet.'

Michel tenderly kissed away the tears from the brown eyes he loved, and the narrative of past pains and terrors became a rapture. Time was flying with the lightning speed it exhibits in such circumstances when, conscience-stricken, Annette suddenly remembered the prayer of the dying penitent.

'Michel,' she said to her lover, 'in the joy of seeing you once again I for a moment forgot a matter of great gravity.'

'What is it, dearest?'

'There is one lying here at the point of death who has done you wrong and who now implores your forgiveness before he passes to his last account.'

'Not Marc Rapp?'

'It is he.'

'The scoundrel!'

'You will forgive him, Michel?'

'Never, Annette.'

'Ah, for my sake you will.'

'Dearest, for your sake I will say so if you like, but it will not be true. My heart will not let me. Think of the villany of that man—his persecution of you—the mean trick by which he has got me out of the way—out of the way,' he

groaned, 'when my poor father was left to be murdered by these savages.'

'I think of it all, Michel, oh, how sadly, but if you saw him wounded, crushed, expiring as I have seen him—if you saw how anxious he is to obtain your forgiveness, if you heard the perpetual murmur of your name upon his lips—you would not continue to be stern towards him.'

'And he is so prostrate?'

'He is utterly changed in mind, and his death is only a question of moments. Oh, Michel, he reckons so confidently on your coming. I have prayed for it—not knowing but you were dead, or in prison, or at the other end of France—and now you have come, come as if guided hither by the hand of Providence, surely you will not refuse this poor sinner's dying petition, surely you will go and offer him that forgiveness for which his soul is thirsting.'

'Annette,' said Michel looking at the passionately pleading girl with an air of wonder, 'can it be that you and I are of the same clay? You so good, so holy, and I so fierce—come, I will go with you.'

Joyfully Annette took his hand in hers and led him to the ward where Marc Rapp lay. At the entrance they met the Superior, to whom Annette in a few brief whispers explained what had come to pass.

'Child,' said the nun simply, 'God has been

good to you, come.' And she led the way towards the bed where Marc Rapp lay. Nearly twenty-four hours had elapsed, and his condition now was scarcely distinguishable from death. He seemed all but unconscious when the soft voice of his nurse recalled his vanishing senses.

'Marc, Marc Rapp, Michel Voss has come to see you.'

The dying man opened his eyes, and murmured for a while, 'Voss, Michel Voss,' as if endeavouring to get hold of an idea he grasped but inadequately. 'Ha,' he exclaimed with a faint vigour, which he almost seemed to have preserved for the last moment. 'Michel Voss,—I have wronged—' but here his voice failed him. With a tremendous spasm he ejaculated the word 'forgive,' raising himself as he did so, and then sank back on his pillow.

Michel, in whom the sight of his prostrate state more than completed the work of Annette's persuasion, took into his the wasted hand which lay above the counterpane. 'Marc Rapp,' said he with solemnity, 'I forgive you as heartily as I hope God may forgive me.'

The dying man made no answer. He could speak no more. Something that could not be called a smile, it was so feeble, but which brightened and for the moment even beautified its aspect, passed over the dark visage, and then the shadow stole across it which told that the spirit had quitted

its earthly abode. The three watchers knelt by the side of the pallet and prayed, not the full ritual which religion prescribes, for death was busy, and there were many others to claim the function of the attendants, but the prayers were of that most acceptable kind, those which we offer for an enemy.

‘Soldier,’ said the nun, ‘I have heard that you are brave, and fight for your country with great heroism; but to-day you have done something nobler than your most valiant action in the field.’

‘Madame,’ said Michel simply, ‘I can claim no credit for what I have done. All the credit is to that good Annette, for whose sake——’

‘Hush,’ said the nun. ‘For her sake! She is a good, pure girl, and I pray that one day she may be your good, pure wife. But not for her sake, not for her sake, must your mercy be, but for His who has died to procure mercy for us all.’

Michel bowed his head and passed out of the chamber of death.

CHAPTER XX.

TOO CLOSE TO BE PLEASANT.

MANY days had not elapsed when Michel found himself at his old quarters. The wound he had received proved serious enough to induce the doctor to order him a bed at the Convent, and he did remain for a while under the care of the tenderest of nurses, and regarded with great interest by all to whom his name and his story were known. But as he lay in bed impatience took absolute possession of him. The thought of his old campaigning ground moved him as the recollection of scenes of pleasure would a disabled debauchee. He fancied his comrades engaged in perils he did not share, in triumphs to which he had not contributed, in losses in which he bore no part. His day was passed in wondering what Mike Mahony might now be doing, how was Felix Richard's leg, would the commandant think he was shirking his duty. His mind in fact was busied with all those torments which crowd so upon a man of active habits suddenly arrested in his career. But his powerful organization told, and though perhaps

the doctor's reluctance to let him return to duty was based on sound principles, Michel had not deceived himself when he said that he felt his strength had all returned, and that he was quite equal to the resumption of his former occupations.

'How have things gone here since I left?' asked Michel of our acquaintance the old soldier.

'Gone!' grumbled the old man, 'they have not gone at all. That is to say, we have not moved, though I believe those confounded Prussians have—nearer to us. We seem to be here for the purpose of counting the stones in the fort. A gun is fired every now and then, it is true; and it makes a noise which inspires the moblots with a belief that the whole Prussian army must be annihilated; but the Prussians take no heed, and keep drawing their infernal lines closer and closer to us.'

'And how is petit Richard?'

'Oh, he goes on bravely,' replied the vieux moustache. 'His leg will be sound enough to run away upon when the Prussians enter that gate there.'

'I do not think it is at running away Richard will shine.—And what does Sergeant Mahony?'

'L'Irlandais?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, well, he tells the men stories, and he smokes his pipe, and he sings for them a frightful howl about some place in his damp native country.'

'Ah, yes,' said Michel, 'he is a gay fellow, and as brave as he is gay.'

'I do not say,' grumbled the veteran, 'that he is not courageous enough. I wish to Heaven that the disposition to look for adventures which you seem to have taught him——'

'No need to teach him that. It is natural to him.'

'I do not care,' angrily interjected the old man. 'But I wish our generals threw a little more enterprise into their proceedings. At all events, I wish that I were twenty years younger, and not pinned to a gun on this crumbling old rampart, that the Prussians will never think worth touching.'

'And where is Mahony now?'

'How can I tell? Two hours ago I saw him with Richard; an hour since he was down on the esplanade, a crowd about him, with a crooked stick and a ball, explaining to them some barbarous game of his Ireland. It was accompanied with the wildest and most unearthly sounds I ever heard, like "Hur-lee" and "Hirad-dee." It seemed to me as if it belonged to some festivity of cannibals.'

Michel hastened off to the esplanade in the hope of meeting his friend, but the assemblage of which the veteran spoke appeared to have dispersed. Within the fort, however, he met a zouave who had seen Mike pass out into the open country.

'Alone?' asked Michel.

‘Ma foi, no. He had a company with him,’ said the soldier laughing.

‘A company! He was not in command of them?’

‘No, nor anybody else. They had an officer though.’

‘Who are they? Who is the officer?’

‘They are the National Guards of the Seine, and the distinguished commander in charge of them is Lieutenant Chapeaubras, hatter of the Rue de Soiebas, elected to his present responsible post by the band of heroes he leads.’

‘And whither have they gone?’ asked Michel in haste. ‘If the Prussians come across them they will annihilate them.’

‘So much the better, comrade.’

Michel thoughtfully went forward to his quarters. He had already reported to his immediate superior, but he had not yet seen the commandant, nor would it have been etiquette on his part expressly to seek him out. But the latter was aware of Michel’s return from his visit to the Minister of War, and desired to question him. Michel found therefore that he was inquired for, and he proceeded at once to head-quarters. Having gratified the commandant’s curiosity, he alluded to the expedition of the National Guards, anxious to know if it had any special destination.

The commandant laughed. ‘They think we regulars understand nothing of our business, and they are gone out to raise the siege.’

‘Have I Monsieur le Commandant’s permission to follow them?’

‘Ha,’ said the commandant with a smile, ‘do you too pin your faith to the finishing of the siege by Lieutenant Chapeaubras?’

‘No, monsieur, but I have a comrade who has gone with them, and I should be glad to see what he is engaged at.’

‘Oh, well, depart. But take care not to prevent the National Guards from eating up the Prussians.’

Michel, having provided himself with his arms, hastened away. He was prompted by mixed feelings. Absence from the scene of his old exploits had brought on him the hunger to renew his adventures, and he was anxious that in so doing he should have the companionship of so brave and trusty a friend as Mike. Then he was actuated by a certain uneasiness respecting his comrade, which, though he did not confess it, was strong in his mind.

Mike had, in a mere spirit of fun, resolved to accompany the expedition. ‘You see,’ he remarked to a companion soldier, ‘none of you need be in the least alarmed for my safety, for if there’s only a shot from the Prussians I know well it will be a hard job to catch hold of my tailors here.’

The band had been formed out of the Club Tonnerre de la France, which was one of the most noted for its tremendous attacks upon the incom-

petency of the government of national defence. Its most amazing orator was the eminent latter Chapeaubras of the Rue de Soiebas. He had over and over again proved to demonstration that Trochu was an incompetent fool, who ought to have been engaged in mending shoes, and he affirmed amidst the laughter of some mocking spirits, and the applause of those who were ready to catch up any extravagance, that a company—not of demoralized regular soldiers—but of patriot national guards, dispatched from each gate of the city, could, with their tremendous *élan*, penetrate the Prussian lines, take the enemy in the rear, drive him under the guns of the forts and annihilate him. Some joker in a solemn voice proposed that the citizen should lead the way in this noble undertaking, and he caught at the bait.

‘Citizens, National Guards,’ he exclaimed in an intoxication of patriotism. ‘I make the call to arms! France speaks to you in the accents of Mirabeau Marat Chapeaubras, your lieutenant and your leader to the gates of death and of victory.’ The spirited call was responded to with thunders of applause. Hundreds of enrolments took place. The Minister of War was appealed to. The old General shrugged his shoulders, but said ‘They can do less harm in a fort than at a club. Pack them off to Nogent; they can do less mischief there than anywhere else.’ It must be confessed that when the period of cool reflection had come,

the majority would have been as well pleased to find their demand refused. Their heroism would have been none the less, and they would, without risk, have had the right to declaim against the lache government which would not permit them to save the country. It will not appear very strange, therefore, that the original hundreds should have dwindled down to seventy, at the head of whom Lieutenant Chapeaubras marched forth from Nogent. For such a force there ought to have been a captain, but Lieutenant Chapeaubras would not hear of an officer being placed over him. The commandant, who did not care a straw what became of a body which he only looked on as a nuisance, acquiesced, and so the lieutenant had the sole glory of being in command, and he left the fort with his head in air, and busy in speculations as to the post he would occupy in the future of that country he was about to save. This state of exultation lasted until they had marched through the Park of Vincennes, and emerged into the open country. Here he made a halt, and for the first time a slight uncertainty seemed to enter his mind.

‘Sergeant Irlandais,’ he called.

Mike approached.

‘Where are the Prussian lines? I do not see them?’

‘I suppose not, your Honour, but if you march straight on three or four miles you’ll be apt to feel them.’

‘What do you mean, fellow? I ask you to point me out the Prussian lines. Do so, or I shall have you arrested for mutiny.’

‘Well, your Honour,’ said Mike with a good-humoured twinkle of his eye, ‘it’s not easy to point out to you what I can’t see myself. The Prussians are all round us—though they don’t show. Very likely,’ said he with a solemn face, ‘they have some apprehension of your coming, as I’m told they’ve spies everywhere and might have heard it. But they have a way of hiding and at the same time firing at you, that——’

‘Sergeant,’ interrupted the National Guard loftily, ‘I look upon you as a coward. My brave Nationals, I will show this regular the superiority of patriotism to discipline.’

Mike shrugged his shoulders, ‘I can only say, your Honour, that I’ll follow you forwards or backwards—and its safe I’ll be I’m thinking in so doing. Be japers, it isn’t though,’ added Mike to himself. ‘Mercy to my soul if we aren’t marching slap on without as much as a vidette.’

And so it was. The patriot despised the rules of strategy, probably had not heard of them. He had some slight notion of discipline, and he might be heard occasionally to call, ‘Citizen Chabot, your chassepot is on the wrong side,’ ‘Citizen Peray, button up your gaiters and look smart,’ ‘Put out your pipes, brave soldiers.’ But as no one paid attention to what he said, the value of

his ideas was questionable. In such fashion they marched until they had neared the farmhouse that had been the scene of an adventure of the two comrades. As they did so, the report of a rifle, and the whizz of a bullet over their heads, produced a sudden halt.

'What is that?' asked Lieutenant Chapeaubras.

'Its Prussian lines they're sending you to say they're here,' said Mike. As he spoke a couple of bullets flew past.

'Why do the cowards not come out and fight fairly?' asked the Commander with a palpable tremour in his voice.

'Oh, the devil a doubt they must have heard your Honour was coming,' said Mike.

A roar of pain broke forth as a couple of additional shots were heard. 'My arm, my arm!' cried citizen Chabot. 'The Prussians are on us.' Citizen Chabot, dropping his rifle, took to his heels and fled. A backward movement began to be manifest, in which even the brave Lieutenant Chapeaubras himself seemed to be included. 'Sound the retreat,' said he in his most dignified tone, but there was none to do so, and, without music, he followed the pack who were now in full career.

'Well,' said Mike Mahony, 'as I can't be expected to conquer the Prussians by myself, I suppose I may go too. Here's for a head, just to

show them we aren't all flying,' and he discharged his chassepot on to the spot from whence the enemy's fire had come, and then strolled leisurely away. He had walked more than a mile before he came up with the company of National Guards, who now appeared to be in a state of excitement of a different kind from that from which they had first suffered. As he approached he heard the noise of angry talking, and could see much gesticulation. When he arrived at the group he saw a peasant in the midst with his hands tied, appealing earnestly to the commander of the National Guards.

'Monsieur,' said the peasant, 'if you will go half-a-mile yonder you will see my papers signed by General Elro, showing that I am acting as a scout for our own volunteers.'

'You are acting as a Prussian spy, and have to-day helped to baffle a movement which would have saved the country and crowned France with immortal glory.'

'I protest, monsieur——'

'Citizens, a file here to shoot this spy.'

'Oh, by japers, this is no fun,' said Mike Mahony to himself. Aloud, 'wouldn't it be better for your Honour to go where he says and look at the papers?'

'I shall do my duty by my country, and execute a spy.'

'But, monsieur, it is not your duty to execute

a man who is probably faithful and useful to us.'

'Seize that mutineer,' thundered the lieutenant. The fact that Mike had seen them fly angered the lieutenant and had not made him very popular with the lieutenant's band, and there was a rush. Mike's arms were caught and he himself completely overpowered. 'I believe,' continued the lieutenant, 'that you are yourself in league with this spy, and you shall share his fate.'

'At least take me before the commandant. You have no authority to execute otherwise.'

'I have authority in the name of my country. Come, a file to shoot these two spies.'

As he spoke, a tall figure dropped lightly over the hedge. 'Michel,' cried Mike in delight, 'look here.'

'May I ask, monsieur, what is this?' inquired Michel Voss, for it was he.

'I am about to have two spies executed,' said the lieutenant, looking surlily at the new comer.

'Spies!' said Michel. 'I am Sergeant Voss. You may have heard of me. That peasant is known to me. He is a brave garçon who has given me valuable information, and has a special protection from the commandant. That soldier is my truest and most valiant comrade.'

'I care not. I do not know you. I will do my duty,' shouted the lieutenant.

‘Pardon, a word in your ear, monsieur. Let me whisper it.’

Without waiting for the lieutenant’s consent, Michel stepped up to him, and murmured low, ‘If you do not order them to be cast loose at once, I will put a revolver bullet into your heart.’

While he spoke, some of the National Guards, who were aware of the reputation of Sergeant Voss, and who had begun secretly to question the competency of their commander, declared that they doubted the tale about the spies, and would not consent to have the men executed. With a white face the lieutenant affected to be influenced by this declaration. ‘After all,’ he said, ‘when a soldier so celebrated as Sergeant Voss declares them to be honest, I feel disposed to pass over their questionable conduct of to-day, and I pardon them for the present; but let them be careful for the future.’

‘Michel,’ said Mike, as the comrades walked home together, ‘you’re after hindering Lieutenant Chapeaubras in the only exploit he is ever likely to perform. On the whole though,’ added he thoughtfully, ‘I’m as well pleased.’

CHAPTER XXI.

A LESSON IN GERMAN.

TWO days after the recent event, a peasant with a basket of vegetables entered the fort of Nogent, inquiring for Sergeant Voss. The latter was quickly found, and greeted his visitor heartily.

‘Well, Ramet,’ said he, ‘I am glad your ill-treatment has not discouraged you from continuing to serve the country.’

‘No, why should it? But it would be a trouble to me if I were ever to meet that infernal tailor or hatter, whatever he is, again.’

‘No fear of that. Our commandant was never too content at having such an officer, and he has dispatched him, and his heroes of the restaurant and the boulangerie, back to the Minister of War, with a request that they may be employed to save France from some of the other fortifications.’

‘Ah, that is well. I risk my life every day amongst these Prussians. When I go in with my vegetables to sell I know that a bare hint of what I am at would suffice to get me hanged, and it is not pleasant then on the other side to run the risk

of being shot by a rascally boutiquier, who cried, "sauve qui peut," when he heard the sound of a Prussian rifle.'

Michel soothed the exasperation of the peasant, which was still warm.

'And what news is there of our friends yonder?'

'News! There is some, I can tell you. They have taken full possession of Neuilly, and have been busy there for the last two days.'

'Heavens! and we idle here. We must try to disturb them.'

'If you do, let me advise you not to go as you have hitherto done by the gardens, but keep the ditches by the Strasbourg road.'

'Will you accompany us?'

'Willingly, as far as the Pioche farm, but if I show myself once to the Prussians my métier is at an end.'

'Right. Simply set us on the track by which we may arrive soonest, and with least chances of observation, and that is all. We shall find out the rest for ourselves. I know the village pretty well.'

'Agreed.'

The party was soon formed and on its way. It included Michel's most trusty and accustomed followers. He had at first thought of asking for a larger number of men, but he feared that if he swelled his force to any considerable extent the chances of surprise would be greatly lessened.

Within half-a-mile of the village the party of twelve divided, Michel leading one, Mike Mahony the other. Thence up the village they crept in Indian file through the ditch, where it was deep stooping low, but where it was shallow actually crossing on hands and knees. 'It reminds me,' remarked Mike in a whisper to his next follower, 'of doing my rounds under the rock near the ould abbey in Clanwilliam, but faith, whether it'll cure either my soul or my body is not so sure.' Arrived without observation at the edge of the main thoroughfare of the village, both parties cautiously observed for a few moments before proceeding to the attack. The enemy had manifestly gone to work with great deliberation to prevent the passage of any sortie through the village. The square blocks of sand-stone which composed the pavement were torn up alternately, giving it something the appearance of a draught-board, and offering a serious barrier to the transport of artillery. Loop-holes had been made in the walls of several of the houses. In the middle of the street there was a group of soldiers amongst whom were two horsemen. Rising as if by magic out of the ground, the Frenchmen formed and delivered a close, well-directed fire. Several of the enemy fell. The remainder, with an astonished look, made a show of resistance, and fled. A café was opposite, and the heads of two soldiers were thrust out of the window. A bullet struck one of them, and he lay

motionless across the sill; the other withdrew. A third dashed out with a wand in his hand. They had been playing billiards on the table of the deserted café. Under the fire of the unexpected foe he fell with the cue in his hand. The church, a quaint romanesque building of the thirteenth century, with a bell tower whose gable top was covered with tiles, stood opposite the café; from behind it there emerged two horsemen who, dashing full gallop into the main street, paused, and then turned to fly. Bullets flew after them, one of which manifestly told, for the foremost soldier was seen to droop forward on his horse's neck. The other, disregarding his own safety, checked the speed of his charger in order to support his comrade, and lead him out of fire.

‘Do not shoot,’ said Michel to one of his men who was levelling his piece for another shot. ‘He is a gallant fellow though a Prussian.’

In a few minutes it seemed there was not a Prussian left in the village. They entered the café. The billiard balls were still on the table; the Prussian soldier still leaned out of the window as if in surprised inquiry as to the foe who had disturbed him; but he would never again on this earth feel surprise, and friend and foe had become alike indifferent to him. Open windows at the back of the house and the traces of footsteps in the garden showed where some others of the party had escaped. From the café they pro-

ceeded to the church. Michel and Mike—unlike many of their comrades—had no sympathy with that section of Frenchmen who scoff at religion. They entered the sacred building with reverence; they were shocked at the aspect it presented. It was evident that it had been made a stable for the post of cavalry, and that beside this desecration wanton destruction had been committed. The glass in the windows was broken in many parts; the altar was soiled, and all over the steps there were scattered torn fragments of the vestments.

‘Sergeant Voss,’ said Barbet, ‘you should not have stopped my hand when I had that cavalry fellow covered.’

‘I don’t know,’ remarked Mike Mahony. ‘I don’t believe he was the ruffian that did these tricks. It’s a queer thing, may be, but my idea is that the blackguard who behaved in the way we see some of them have done here would be just the fellow to bolt when a comrade was hit without thinking of him.’

‘Toll the church bell,’ said Michel. ‘It will startle still further these fellows flying, and lead them to believe we are in strong force.’

‘There is no rope to the bell,’ cried a soldier.

‘Up into the tower, then, some one or two of you. Beside ringing the bell keep a look-out. I go on to see if the village is clear of these cattle.’ And Michel left the church with the bulk of his

force. Two remained behind to execute the instructions relative to the tower. They were Barbet and Mike Mahony. The tower evidently was but rarely ascended. The stairs were broken, and without protection at the side. The only floor was a kind of double trap-door, in which could be seen the hole through which the rope used to pass. Into the apartment formed by this the two men entered, and Mike at once indulged in a fantasia on the bell, of great vigour if not of exceeding sweetness. After he had amused himself with this occupation until his arm was tired, he looked out towards a screen of trees which lay a few hundred yards from the village. 'Why, Barbet,' he cried, 'my bell ringing instead of frightening these thieves away is only conjuring them up. Look there.'

'Ma foi,' said Barbet, 'there they are and in numbers too.'

'Are you loaded?'

'Yes.'

'Well, let us fire at the headmost men. Our fellows are too far away to be attracted by our voices, but they will guess what a shot means.'

Out of the screen of trees there had ridden a dozen troopers followed by more than a company of infantry. The soldiers were divided into single files at each side of the road, a precaution that seemed to be taken to guard against a renewed surprise. As they advanced along the road the

head of each rank seemed exactly to front the tower. 'Now,' said Mike to his comrade, 'the thing is to give the alarm to ours, but to take down a man at the same time would be to leave two enemies the less for them to deal with—you the left hand, I the right—fire.' At the word his taciturn companion obeyed, and Mike followed his own direction; the horse on the left stumbled and threw his rider, the trooper on the right slid off his charger never to mount him again.

'Firing from the church tower!' cried Michel. 'Together men. Draw back cautiously. It is an alarm.'

The unexpected fire had caused a momentary confusion in the German ranks. Strange to say, they did not seem to observe whence it proceeded, but it impressed them with the necessity for caution, for they made a new disposition of their men, and entered the village. This time the infantry, in open order, were in advance, the cavalry following. As they approached the tower Barbet in a low voice asked Mike should he fire again. The reply was 'Load but watch.'

The Prussians continued to advance, and several were now right under the tower, the elevation of which was not very great.

'It is a tempting moment,' said Barbet.

'Hush. If they come to a fight with our fellows, well and good—we will have a share in it. But my idea is that there will be no fight this time.'

And so in patience the two occupants of the tower watched. The party was under the command of an officer, evidently of rank, and whose breast, though he was in undress, bore several decorations. An expression of vexation was on his countenance, and it was plain that he was railing at his subordinates in good set terms.

‘It wouldn’t be difficult to stop his jaw now,’ remarked Mike, as with rifle in hand he looked down upon the face of the angry officer.

‘Shall I?’ eagerly exclaimed Barbet.

‘No, no. He’s pitching into these blackguards, and only giving them their due. But there’s a better reason than that, for if you fired it’s a short lease of these little premises you’d have, I’m thinking.’

As they watched they saw the countenance of the officer grow more and more angry, while those about him were becoming manifestly more uneasy. Non-commissioned officers went and came, and with each arrival the vexation of the commander grew more evident. At last with a bitter exclamation he turned and, giving some orders, rode away accompanied by three dragoons, and followed by a portion of the infantry.

‘Barbet,’ said Mike in a sort of whisper.

‘Well,’ said his companion.

‘Did you think I knew German?’

‘I know you speak some outlandish tongue, but I didn’t think it was German.’

‘No, it wasn’t either. It wasn’t German you ever heard me speak, nor did any one else. But I’ll tell you all the conversation that went on below there.’

‘You!’

‘Me—who the devil else is likely to tell you? Perhaps you’d wish me to call up that fat sergeant there and ask him to report it to you.’

‘Oh, not at all—go on.’

‘Well then, when that officer—Captain Graf Von Bigboots came up there, he said, “How many do the enemy number?” and the thin sergeant said, “I do not know, Herr Graf,” and he replied, “And why the devil don’t you know?” and the thin sergeant said, “We can find no enemy in the village,” and on this, mon ami, the officer, observes, “You are a pack of infernal blockheads and asses to allow yourselves to be fooled this way by a few Frenchmen,” and the young cornet that was there without a beard told him that it was probable the French had fled, which made the officer at last swear in very loud German, and ask was it possible that a body of men large enough to beat half a company out of the village, and which fired on them as they were entering it, could have so entirely disappeared as to have left no trace of them; and then the fattest of all the sergeants came up and said they had searched all the large houses and most of the country round, but that no Frenchman could be

seen; and at last the Graf roared out that he would not stay to be mortified by such a set of incapable noodles, ordered half a company of infantry and eight of the cavalry to remain and if possible keep their eyes open in the village, and rode off.'

'And how,' said Barbet, wondering, 'did you know this?'

'Know it! I read it, man.'

'Read it?'

'Yes, I read it as plain as print—plainer a deal than some print I have seen—in his face.'

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANC-TIREURS OF THE PRESS.

‘LET us call our roll,’ said Michel, as the small party which had been driven out of Neuilly assembled a mile and a half away, without sound of trumpet or beat of drum. ‘Has any one seen Sergeant Mahony?’

‘Why, did you not observe him go up into the church tower?’

‘Good Heavens, no! He is lost then. Who was with him?’

‘Barbet.’

‘Ah, a brave fellow. They will sell their lives dearly if they are to lose them, and I do not think they will easily be made prisoners. Come, let us see how we stand. Roichon, Colon, Peray—all right. Ah, poor Merville—that shot at the corner of the lane did for him, though the Prussian that fired it never saw him.’ And so Michel went through his roll, and found that, bating one man struck dead by a chance bullet from the enemy, and the two left in the village, the number was complete. He was not, however, so cool as he affected to be. It was an essential part of

his plan that casualties to individuals were to be lightly passed over. 'A man down, another in his place,' was generally supposed to be sufficient requiem for the bravest. A deep affection, the result of perils and fortunes and confidences shared together, had grown up in his breast for the light-hearted Irishman, but he did not think it prudent to let his companions see that it weighed too much on him, or that the commander of the little force violated the Spartan rule that regulated the band. Nevertheless, as he gave the word to proceed on to the fort, his mind was busy revolving plans for the rescue of his comrade. He knew perfectly well that he had but to suggest to his own force the renewal of the attack, and they would cheerfully follow him in the attempt; but he knew also it would be useless, now especially that the enemy was on the qui vive, and he did not feel himself justified in sacrificing them merely to gratify his personal feelings. He was busy with such thoughts when Roichon, who was in advance, fell back slowly and intimated to him that there were men moving behind the screen of trees which lay to their right.

'They must be the enemy,' said Roichon, 'shall we fire?'

'No haste. The enemy could hardly have got between us and the fort without our perceiving them. Beside, if they were Prussians, they would move more cautiously.'

As he spoke two of the party they were observing came out from the shelter of the trees, and they had a full opportunity of observing them. One, who seemed to assume the leadership, was a small but muscular man, with a handsome face and bright eye. His round hat, in which a short, smart feather was fastened, a well-fitting brown doublet and breeches of the same colour, with neat gaiters and stout boots, all had a suspicion of the stage of the Italian opera about them, though not *prononcé* enough for a *Fra Diavolo* or *Elvino*. He carried with him a serviceable looking rifle and sword, and he had a revolver stuck in his belt. His companion seemed far more out of place in the sylvan scenery. Though carrying similar arms, his dress was less suited to rough tasks. He was attired in black, which had been precise, but was now, though not worn, excessively stained. A dress frock, an open vest, displaying abundance of shirt front, and trousers as full at the hips as those of a gendarme, formed the bulk of his costume, which was crowned by one of those tall silk hats that used to form the wonder and admiration of Englishmen when they visited the Boulevards a few years ago. Beneath was a visage almost as long as the hat, adorned with a grey moustache and beard, and eyes that glittered behind a pair of spectacles. The two were conversing with great animation, and took no trouble to observe the soldiers who, with

habitual caution, had kept themselves to some extent concealed.

'These are not Prussians, evidently,' said Michel. 'Do you know who they are?'

'Commissioners, I suppose, come out to see that the army is minding its business,' said Gerbet, who was suspected of a little historical reading.

'Who goes there?' called Michel in a loud voice, which broke in upon the conversation of the strangers.

'Franc-Tireurs of the Press,' answered the smaller of the two promptly, and coming forward with easy confidence to the soldiers.

'Monsieur, I have heard of your force,' said Michel, 'as having done good service.'

The other laughed with a cheery, easy manner. 'I think,' he said, 'I should have made quite a Natty Bumpo, or what is that other fellow in Cooper's romance, if it were not for my friend and second in command here. When we ought to be creeping on our bellies Indian fashion to surprise a foe, he engages me in a discussion on the propriety of a Second Chamber, which sets us both by the ears, and our tongues wagging at such a rate that we might as well march on the enemy with drum beating and trumpet blowing. Your name, friend?'

'Sergeant Voss.'

'Sergeant Voss, indeed. I am glad to see so

celebrated a Franc-Tireur. Now I wager you have not considered the necessity of a Second Chamber.'

'Never, monsieur.'

'Nor whether it would act as a balance against the preponderance of an aggressive democracy, or whether it would be oligarchy in another shape?'

'No, monsieur.'

'Aha,' laughed the questioner, 'I thought so, otherwise you would not have been so successful in trapping the Prussians.'

'But,' interjected the tall companion, with a lugubrious voice, 'you do not put the question of a Second Chamber so that it may be looked at in its proper aspect——'

'The proper way to look at it, ami, is to put it out of sight—when there is more pressing work to be done.'

'Ah, perhaps you are right,' sighed the tall journalist.

'Why, good friend, if these soldiers had happened to be Saxons instead of Frenchmen they might have brought us down with a couple of shots while we were both on the horns of that infernal dilemma of the Second Chamber.'

'Quite true, but do you not perceive that if you would state the case fairly——'

'But the thing is not to state it at all. Come,' and he struck a theatrical attitude, 'I will swear

you on the cross of my sword-bayonet not to mention the Second Chamber for the next forty-eight hours.'

'I will take the oath,' said the tall man with a sigh, 'but I am dreadfully afraid of perjury. You remember how completely Napoleon broke his oath in regard to the constitution of the——'

'What!' said the other, holding up his finger admonishingly.

'Ah!' sighed the tall journalist, and was silent.

'Sergeant Voss,' said the first speaker, 'I have not introduced myself. I am Emile Mandeman, editor of *Le Futur*, two months ago the leading legitimist organ in France, now, alas, an organ with its bellows quite puffed out; my friend here was, at the same time, Monsieur Alcide Derobant, well-known as the powerful writer Lycurgus in the chief Orleanist journal—very nearly extinct also. Now two months ago what where you?'

'A simple peasant in the Vosges mountains, monsieur.'

'And what are you now?'

'A simple sergeant in the French army, monsieur?'

'No, Voss, but a hero—decorated, I am told, too—which, by the way, seems rather ridiculous, seeing that you deserved it.'

'Monsieur is very good——'

'That is not to the point. Now here is to the point. Here are two able journalists, full of genius,

able to shoot even — and really scarce worth their salt. There are you, who I hope have no genius——’

‘None whatever, monsieur,’ interrupted Michel with a shake of the head.

‘Good. There you are, happily destitute of genius, and yet able to do something. Now suppose we were for once to join our incapacity to your capacity, perhaps we should be able to strike a smart blow somewhere.’

‘Monsieur, the adventure is ready if you are disposed to join.’

‘Magnifique! This is what I have desired. We have fought already, but our trials have not had the air of romance or adventure that I longed for.’

‘This will have it in abundance, monsieur. It is to rescue a couple of our comrades who are lying perdus in the church tower at Neuilly.’

‘Bravo! That is precisely what I have wanted. Allons.’

The remainder of the band had by this time come up, and proved to number about twenty. They did not in appearance seem men whom a recruiting sergeant would have selected, but they held their weapons as if they knew how to use them, and they had the advantage which, even in the rough work of soldiering, intelligence undoubtedly possesses. Michel explained to M. Mandeman in more detail the object of the ad-

ventures he proposed, with a sketch of the events which had brought about the imprisonment of the captives. The leader of the press band explained in turn to his followers, and there was a hearty chorus of assent to the expedition.

‘In all probability, monsieur,’ said Michel, ‘we shall be out-numbered, even when our two forces are joined together.’

‘Are you quite sure of that?’

‘I am not sure, but, after what has happened in the village to the Prussians, I feel perfectly certain they will leave such a force there as they are sure will not be easily beaten out.’

‘Hurrah! That is exactly what I want. Oh, to drive out a superior force of these fellows! That is an adventure, indeed.’

‘Monsieur, we shall have to divide. As I know the country better than you I will try to penetrate the village from the side; you will have to approach it from the front, where you can make less mistake. Our first shots shall be your signal for advance.’

‘Sergeant, I feel inclined to embrace you. Your adventure makes me feel a hero and your plan persuades me I am a tactician.’

‘But, monsieur, are you going to take that sad-looking old gentleman with you?’

‘Whom do you mean? My friend Dero-bant?’

‘Him with the spectacles? It seems a shame

to bring a weak old gentleman like him into such a business.'

'Ha, Derobant, mon ami. Have the goodness to step this way a moment.'

The old journalist, who had been standing apart with an abstracted air, came forward promptly.

'Derobant, have the goodness to stoop and let me take off your hat.'

'What do you want of it?'

'Stoop, please.'

The elder man stooped, and Mandeman took the lofty structure from his friend's head. After passing his arm around it tenderly to smooth the nap, he pointed to a hole near the top which was partly hidden by the silk.

'Sergeant,' he said, 'do you know what that is?'

'It is like a bullet mark.'

'Now, Derobant, what has become of the Prussian who fired that shot?'

'He was a Saxon—I know the uniform.'

'Well, well,' impatiently interrupted his friend, 'Prussian or Saxon, what has become of him?'

'He is dead.'

'Who killed him?'

'Well, I shot him.'

'Now, look again, Sergeant. Do you think you see a hole lower down?'

'I have no doubt of it.'

'Who made that, Derobant?'

‘A Bavarian.’

‘Is he dead?’

‘I think not. I fancy my bullet hit him in the arm because I saw the rifle fall out of his hand, but he did not fall himself.’

‘Now, friend, do you think the old gentleman will be able to take care of himself?’

‘I am proud of such a comrade.’

‘Why, man,’ added Mandeman gaily, ‘that miraculous hat of his is fatal to the enemy. It towers over every barrier, and always draws the fire of the foe, so that they betray themselves to his unerring aim,’ and he laughed heartily as they moved away to make their arrangements for the march.

A few minutes after Michel turned his head in their direction and was startled to see Mandeman clap his hand to his side and draw his sword. He sprang over, but as he did so his fears were appeased. Mandeman, lifting the naked weapon above his head, called ‘Remember your oath. You were just about to enter the forbidden Chamber.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RESCUE.

THE watch of the two soldiers left in the tower became tedious and discouraging. The tramp of the departing enemy gave them no comfort, for there were numbers still left sufficient to annihilate them. An air of sullen watchfulness, too, pervaded the German soldiers. They were not maintained absolutely in rank, but a few of them who left the group in front of the church with the intention of playing billiards at the café were harshly called back. Sentries were set at each inlet of the village, and the whole of the men were kept under arms. By-and-by pipes were lit. Discipline, which entered the German's soul, which brought him to bear insult, blows, and tyranny of all kinds, had to stop short with his tobacco. It had found it safe to rob him of his freedom, but it dared not put out his pipe. The soldiers availed themselves of the one privilege which their superiors had left to them, and they smoked. They smoked as men do who are not in a hurry, but rather as those who have a long time to pass and know that they can have full and

leisurely enjoyment, and it became evident to the anxious observers in the tower that the considerable force before them had determined to occupy the village.

‘Have you anything to eat?’ asked Barbet, in a tone scarce above a whisper.

‘A biscuit.’

‘I have the same. It is not much for men who have had no dinner.’

‘I wouldn’t call it a banquet myself, but we can divide our bit in halves, and then, with our breakfast, we shall have what I can tell you it isn’t every man in Ireland has—three meals a day.’

Barbet made a grimace. ‘If even I had my pipe,’ he said.

‘Ay, ’twould be something, but if you tried it it might be your last. Why these scoundrels below would hear you striking a match.’

‘What are they at now?’

‘Dining, I suppose.’

Barbet groaned, took his biscuit out of his pocket, broke it in halves, put one back and munched the other.

‘What is that they are eating, in the name of all that’s wonderful?’ asked Mike.

‘I suppose its saur-kraut.’

‘Sure saur-kraut can’t be like that. It would be a queer thing to carry cabbage in your hat.’

‘Ma foi, no—I see it now,’ said Barbet. ‘It

is a sausage. Each man takes one out of his helmet.'

'See that, now,' said Mike thoughtfully. 'It isn't what I'd call myself a very neat style of serving a dinner, but upon my soul it's a very handy way of carrying a bit of meat with a man when he's likely to be in difficulties, and when there isn't a genteel cookshop round the corner to order it from.'

To be situated in a tower where to make the slightest noise is certain to bring you under the observation of enemies alert and watchful, is far from being agreeable, nor were the pleasures of the situation added to by the only variety afforded being in studying the dinners or the forms of the pipes in which the hostile soldiers indulged. In this condition, however, did they remain as the day wore on, and twilight began to descend upon the landscape. To the privation of hunger now succeeded the pain of intense cold, the open, elevated belfry of the tower being peculiarly exposed to the chill November wind which began to blow as the evening advanced.

'I suppose you think it's laughing I am,' said Mike.

'There's not much to laugh at I should think,' responded Barbet gloomily.

'Well, you see, my jaws are going as if I was as merry as a lark, but the truth is it's only my teeth that are banging against each other from the cold.'

‘Very probably.’

‘I suppose,’ continued Mike with an air of deep consideration, ‘that’s what may be called laughing at the wrong side of my mouth.’

His companion made no answer. Even if he were inclined to be talkative he would have hardly understood Mike’s meaning.

‘Come,’ said Mike, ‘it won’t do to be gloomy. I can’t ask you to sing, for the naughty boys below there might be throwing something worse than stones at the windows——’

‘You are very light-hearted.’

‘What’s to prevent me? not the weight of my dinner anyhow.’

‘How long are we to remain in this infernal rat-trap?’

‘Ah, that’s the question. I’m as sure as that I’m in this cheap, but airy lodging, that Michel hasn’t forgotten us, and will take the first opportunity to try and get us out of it.’

‘Well?’

‘Exactly, but you see the handful he has with him are hardly enough to dispose of all them down below there very easily.’

‘That’s probably true, but it is not agreeable.’

‘My own opinion, too, comrade. But then you see Michel Voss is a kind of fellow now that you never can tell what he will do, and, strange as it may seem to you, it’s my firm belief that he’ll circumvent them ruffians down there—numerous as they are.’

‘Well, I should like to see him,’ said Barbet, in a spiritless tone. ‘But suppose he does not come, or suppose he does not come for a week, what are we to do then? If we gave ourselves up, they would at all events give us something to eat.’

‘It’s my opinion they’d try whether you could digest a bullet. Remember you are a franc-tireur.’

‘Ay, but a soldier in uniform.’

‘That’s an advantage certainly; it would save you from a rope, which, I’m told, is what they use with franc-tireurs out of uniform. It’s a saving people they are, these Germans. You see a rope does fifty, and a cartridge in a general way can’t be expected to execute more than one.’

‘Then you think,’ said Barbet, ‘that when the worst comes to the worst, we ought to fight it out, and sell our lives as dearly as possible.’

‘Barbet, I see my French must be improving, for you hit off my meaning to a T.’

‘Very good, I am content. Is your piece loaded? Mine is.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘If your rifle is ready I will take a pull at that bell and alarm the enemy, then blaze away and compel them to put us out of pain.’

‘Pooh, I’d reserve my fire until it was of some use, and help Michel when he comes here.’

‘By the time he comes here we shall be starved to death like mice in an empty church, or we shall

be so congealed with cold we shall not be able even to fire a shot.'

'Look, Barbet, if I were so frozen that you might skate over me, the sight of Michel Voss would set me thawing. But anyhow we can hold out until to-morrow. Our rifles are loaded, and it will be very far gone with us when we can't load a second time. Let us, at all events, wait until to-morrow morning. I don't say I could go beyond that—I certainly could not look at them thieves at breakfast without wanting to put some leaden marigolds into their soup. Let us say at nine o'clock to-morrow we ring the bell.'

'Agreed,' said Barbet, and the men grasped hands. In a few moments both were lying down and buried in a slumber which many of the so-called favourites of fortune would be glad to purchase with gold.

Early to bed and early to rise is a combination of cause and consequence which holds true even in the draughty belfry of a church tower. Mike had slept soundly but it was still dark when he awoke. He experienced a gnawing pain of which he had no difficulty in determining the origin. To still its importunity he rose and looked through the openings in the tower. It was so dark that he could scarcely see the German soldiers below him, though their presence was betrayed by the odd glitter of a bayonet, and the subdued hum of voices showed that several were awake and on the

watch. 'Why, then,' said Mike, indulging his thoughts after his own fashion, 'it's a pleasant thing to be perched up here in this cock-loft, without bit or sup, and the exthrame probability that my first male will be sweetened with sugar of lead. Mr Mahony, my frind, you've got into a good many scrapes, but this seems likely to rub you out as clane as ever the bit of injun-rubber did the beautiful copies—eh! what the devil's that? Hush—Barbet!'

• Mike's soliloquy was interrupted by the sound of a shot which seemed to proceed from the rear of the church. He woke his comrade, who sprang promptly but bewildered to his feet.

'What is this?' exclaimed the half-awakened sleeper.

'What is it? Take to your rifle man, and be ready. You may kick me out of that window if that isn't Michel Voss. Oh, Lord, if I could only give one screech!'

While they spoke a tremendous commotion had sprung up. The guard in front rushed to their arms and several of them ran in the direction from which the first sound was heard. The solitary shot appeared like a signal, for immediately after followed the sharp rattle of eight or ten rifles, which seemed to be replied to briskly. While the listeners in the tower were marking with strained attention the sounds of conflict in the rear of the church, there came from the right, and evidently

enflading the street, the ring of some twenty rifles. Below there was evident confusion.

‘Barbet, you devil! they’re taken on two sides. At them on the third. Blaze away.’

Two shots rattled from the tower into the surprised group below.

‘Load again, Barbet, and fire away. I’ll give them a serenade.’ And while Barbet discharged his piece, Mike sprang to the bell and banged at it with all his might. The sudden boom of the instrument in the deep silence of the night, and amid the deadly work which was going on all round, had a startling effect, and added a new element of confusion to the double surprise which had come upon the enemy. The latter fired. They replied by a volley to the shots which were now rapidly coming up the street; they fired at the bell tower, and their bullets whizzed by the heads of its little garrison; but there was uncertainty in their resistance. Surprise, the ignorance of the force they had to deal with, and a touch of panic all were beginning to exert their influence. And now the party of defenders who had gone to the rear of the church came retreating hastily back, bringing with them some wounded. This circumstance decided the main body, and before many minutes had passed they were retiring rapidly through the village pressed hard by the now united bodies of the assailants.

‘I think, monsieur,’ said Michel Voss to Man-

‘You think so? Well, I am content many do you fancy the enemy were?’

‘Not short of fifty.’

‘And we are not thirty. Well, Don I has probably done more wonderful things, not bad for poor moderns who have to de muskets and discipline, and such levelli chines.’

‘Pardon me, monsieur, but I want to go tower, and look for our comrades. That they must be alive, for I heard the bell just now.’

‘Ay, and so did the enemy, and a consi start it seems to have given them. But means, let us go and see the distressed dam have come to rescue.’

They hastened to the church tower, fr foot of which they halloood to the men abo

‘Barbet,’ said Mike Mahony, ‘do you rec the voice below there? What did you?’

‘It is Michel Voss.’

‘Of course it is.’ Then, stooping, he down, ‘Get us a ladder, we are too faint to down—though I think,’ he added, ‘we the advantage of having become very weights.’

No ladder was to be had, but means were

by the piling of benches and other articles to make the descent easy.

‘Mike, old comrade, how rejoiced I am to see you.’

‘Michel, if you were the ugliest and the wickedest fellow in the French army, I would be glad to see you just now; but you aren’t, only the handsomest and best.’

‘Hush, mon ami. Welcome, Barbet, brave comrade.’

‘Thanks, Voss.’

‘Do you know, my good friend,’ said Mandeman, addressing Mike, ‘that you are somewhat of a disappointment. I am glad to have assisted in your rescue, but you ought really to have been a distressed damsel.’

‘But, your Honour, I was distressed enough for any damsel. And for that matter, if you should ever again have the chance of trying a rescue out of this tower, I am satisfied to have it any damsel in the world you like to select—except two.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE INVITATION.

‘**D**ID you ever go after a fox, Michel?’

‘Never. It does not seem to me an animal worth hunting.’

‘Nor after a hare?’

‘I have shot a hare, but hunt it—no, never.’

‘Ah, well, you can’t understand then.’

‘What is it?’

‘Well, you see in my country they hunt both. The people that hunt do it in different ways. Lord Ballingarry, for instance, when he goes out has a red coat to show ’tis after a fox he is—red, I suppose, on account of the colour of the beast; and when he is out after a hare, it’s a green coat he wears, but why green I can’t say, for the hares—even in Ireland, though we are the emerald gem—are not green. Lord Ballingarry when he goes out has one thundering fine horse to carry him over everything, and when that horse is beat out, up comes a groom with another fresh one to let his lordship pelt away at his best. Well, now, that wasn’t the way I hunted.’

‘Indeed.’

‘No. I wore the same coat—jacket, I ought to say—whether ’twas a fox or a hare they were after, and it was neither red nor green, and very often indeed you’d find it hard to say whether it had a colour at all. And then I had no horse but shanks’ mare——’

‘Eh?’

‘Oh, an animal greatly used in Ireland—la jument des jambes. Ay, and with that many a time I was up to the death as well as Lord Ballingarry himself, for, you see, the weight was light and the wind was good.’

‘I perceive.’

‘But now to come to the point. In hunting a fox you go straight over the country, and when your run is at an end you may see yourself twenty miles from where you started.’

‘Very pleasing, I am sure.’

‘If it’s a hare you’re after she runs in a circle, and after you’ve gone over half-a-dozen big fields, why you find yourself may be where you set off.’

‘Après?’

‘Well, now it just occurs to me that we are a long time hare-hunting. We go out and we have a bit of a scrimmage—or—we haven’t; but whether or not, we come back to the blessed fort again, just as if we started a puss on the lower side of Ballywilliam bog, kept the dogs after her for two hours or more, and in the end we’d be

sure to find her passing through that same darling bog again.'

'Well,' questioned Michel, rather puzzled, 'what do you want?'

'I want a fox hunt.'

'But we have no fox here.'

'Couldn't we go somewhere that there was a chance of seeing new ground? Couldn't we get to some expedition that would go farther than this village of Neuilly we are so often leaving? I think I could tell the number of uncut cabbages in every garden between this and Neuilly.'

'You see we are in a state of siege, and the Prussians would have to be consulted as to leaving you to hunt your fox through their lines.'

'But there are other Prussians beside them infernal Saxons that are opposite us there, and there are other villages beside Neuilly and Brie. We are moving from the fort to Neuilly and back again like a weaver's shuttle. Couldn't we manage to get north or south? There doesn't seem to be much chance of a big fight here, and do you know, Michel, I begin to think killing odd Prussians is growing monotonous.'

'Ah,' said Michel thoughtfully, 'I did not think you would grow tired——'

'Tired! No, man, that's not it—or at least it's this way. You know if you were after a long march you'd like to ease yourself with a jump, or if you'd been at a reading lesson for half-an-hour, as I

used to be with Jimmy the Ink-bottles, you'd give the world to be let screech——'

'Oh, I perfectly understand.'

'Sergeant Voss, my paladin, my Philistine slayer, come, let me embrace you; Sergeant Irlan-dais, your hand.'

The interruption came from a pleasant voice which was tolerably familiar to both, being that of M. Mandeman, the leader of the Press Franc-Tireurs. The men turned to greet the new-comer, and found him accompanied by his friend Derobant, and some other members of his corps.

'Aha, mes amis, what new conquests are you meditating—what new methods of striking terror into the heart of the invaders? Don't interrupt me, Derobant, I know on what subject you were going to speak, but remember the forty-eight hours have not elapsed, as it is not the afternoon of the second day, and you would not violate the oath taken on the cross of my sword-bayonet. I see you are going to open your mouth—your oath, your oath!'

M. Derobant, overwhelmed, looked unutterable things but was silent.

'So, as I hear, you have been in that charming village again, doing a small bit of admonition to the foe. How many of you were there? Two? Was it a case of two to one on your side then? Ah, it is a welcome novelty you have introduced into our system of warfare, keeping the odds on

our part, though for my own share I think there is the more glory when with a few you defeat an army.'

'Certainly, monsieur, but——'

'Ah, I thoroughly understand, the object is to win, and no doubt we have lost heavily by allowing the two to one to be always the other way. But to my question. What game is afoot? What new enterprise is about to call forth the daring of the dweller of the Vosges and the energy of the Emerald Isle—is it not that you call your distant, but I have no doubt charming, country, Sergeant!'

'Oh yes, monsieur, they call it that. The watering-pot of nature, you see, is always making the grass grow, and on that account they're in the habit of calling it names, as you say. They call it, too, the Island of Saints.'

'Eh, yes, I have heard that. Can you give me the precise reason?'

'Well, your Honour, there's a saying in Ireland when something awfully cross turns out, 'twould fret a saint, and so many things happen there to make you fret, and still we stand it somehow, that really we must be a parcel of saints.'

'Your explanation is very striking, my friend. In my opinion you ought to be a member of the Academy. But in what enterprise is your sainted valour now engaged?'

'We were at the trouble of thinking, monsieur.'

‘Possibly, I could give you a help.’

‘Faith, it wouldn’t be the first time, your Honour.’

‘Oh, I mean that I might help you to an idea. Sergeant Voss, have you any special plan in contemplation?’

‘A good many notions, monsieur, have been passing through my head. I saw hoof-tracks to the north of Neuilly yesterday, with the marks of boots amongst them. It occurred to me that a party of the enemy, horse and foot, were pushing their reconnoissance higher up——’

‘And you thought of falling upon them?’

‘Not single-handed, certainly, monsieur, but of watching their movements so that we might arrange either to entrap or drive them back.’

‘Anything else?’

‘Well, monsieur, we have got possession of the islands, and I had a notion of crossing the river.’

‘To do what?’

‘I do not know. Whatever might happen to turn up.’

‘Voss, you are just such a man as I longed, but scarcely hoped, to see in this most wise and Philistine age of ours.—But stop. I am not going to flatter you, I am going to do what will probably please better your unsophisticated mind. Are you not tired of this narrow round? Would you not like a bigger adventure with a farther push in it?’

‘Monsieur Mandeman, are you a witch?’ blurted out Mike Mahony.

‘My sex ought to be the answer, ami Irlandais, even if my lack of skill to ride the whirlwind were not palpable enough when I had to go on hands and knees through that accursed slough on the road to Neuilly.’

‘Well, monsieur, I could almost have thought you heard me talking to Michel before you came up.’

‘Monsieur,’ said Michel, ‘my comrade has found this limited space here grow monotonous, and he is anxious for new ground, and a farther dash, if possible, into the enemy’s line. For myself, I have no objection to what goes on here, but I should not regret to be in an adventure of a different kind. Do you know of any such?’

‘Derobant, do you not think the Colonel has something in his mind in the way of a good expedition out of our fort up there?—now beware, don’t wander into the——’

‘I know, I know,’ answered the elder journalist with a little impatience. ‘He has, but I am not permitted to mention any of the particulars.’

‘Oyeh, monsieur, never be particular about a bit of diversion. Is it to be big?’

‘I think it’s to be serious.’

‘Hurroo! That’s the pleasantest news I’ve heard for—for the last ten or eleven days.’

‘My friend, the Colonel has confided the

general idea of the affair to me, because we have been very intimate, though there is one point I regret to say in which his views and mine differ. He thinks the Second——'

'Derobant!' cried his friend in a voice of thunder.

'Eh!'

'Will you lay perjury upon your soul?'

The poor old gentleman looked bewildered, blushed, and relapsed into silence.

'My lads,' said Mandeman, 'there is, I think, a project under way that you will have no objection to take a share in. At all events, it is well to see something of the world, and our fort is quite a dozen miles hence, and a dozen miles is really a grand tour now. I have no doubt my excellent acquaintance the commandant here will give you a furlough of a week on condition of my undertaking to return you as safe and sound—as I can.'

'Monsieur, I may say for myself and my friend that we are delighted with the chance.'

'Ah, I am truly happy to have such comrades. When shall you be able to start?'

'Once we have obtained leave, monsieur, we shall be ready on the instant.'

'Yes, the baggage is light,' remarked Mike.

'Excellent; it is as well that we should be prompt. The way is long, and in some places not over easy owing to the Prussians, and it would be well we were at the fort before night.'

‘Monsieur,’ said Mike, addressing M. Derobant who had remained silent.

‘Eh, mon ami?’

‘Might I take a liberty with you, sir?’

‘Certainly,’ returned the journalist politely.

‘It’s only to have a look at the hat, sir.’

M. Derobant gravely took off the tall hat and without a word handed it to Mike.

‘There they are—one, two—ah, and here’s three, and by the hokey, here’s four. Four shots in the hat, monsieur.’

Monsieur bowed.

‘The fellows that put them bullets in got them back again, I go bail?’

M. Derobant shook his head. ‘No, I could not use their bullets, you know. It was with my own I shot them.’

‘M. Mandeman,’ said Mike, ‘I told you before I belonged to the Island of Saints. There’s one thing though that spoils me for a saint, and that’s the habit of saying bad words. Now, I am always trying to mend. Like the old gentleman that tries to break himself of the habit of snuff-taking by putting flour into his nose, I try to get out of sinful swearing by using mild oaths.’

‘Ah, a capital plan.’

‘In that way I used to swear by the hole in my coat.’

‘Eh, bien?’

‘Well, monsieur, in future I’ll swear by the hole in M. Derobant’s hat.’

CHAPTER XXV.

LE BOURGET.

THE evening was closing when the Franc-Tireurs of the press, accompanied by Michel, Mike, and a half-dozen of their usual companions, reached Fort d'Aubervilliers. On their arrival it soon became evident that something of moment was in contemplation. Mandeman and Derobant received intimation to proceed to the quarters of the commandant of their corps. Mobiles and regulars in large numbers were under arms, and there was that indescribable air over everything which spoke of preparation and movement. The little party from Nogent felt themselves rather out of place. They seemed to belong to no one and to have no business to do. Those attached to the fort, beyond a casual glance of curiosity at the new comers, paid no attention to them. One raw mobile took them for recruits from some of the departments, and attempted to patronize them, whereupon Barbet tugged at his moustache, and swore at the little man till he would have run into a German battery to make his escape.

'One would think 'twas Prussians we were,' said Mike Mahony.

'Prussians? Why so?'

'Why just because its the habit, as we ought to know now, to care about everything except where the enemy are.'

'Ha,' said Mandeman, at last returning, 'our commander is exceedingly rejoiced at such an effective addition to our volunteers, and you, I am sure, will be glad to learn that we have a piece of real work on hand.'

'Soon, monsieur?'

'To-night.'

'Good' was the universal form of assent uttered by the soldiers.

'I will see about having you supplied with provisions. There is no need to look about quarters here for the night. You will have to make those somewhere away from the fort,' and, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper, 'you will have to take them from the Prussians.'

'Bravo.'

'I need not ask about your arms.'

'No, monsieur, you need not. I think we shall be found well prepared on that point.'

'And now, comrades, for the vivres. It would be bad generalship to go on a campaign with empty stomachs.'

'It's a great pity your Honour wasn't head of the commissariat in some of the battles we first tried.'

Some hours after, the expedition set out. It comprised the franc-tireurs of the press, half a battalion of mobiles, and a few regulars, including the little party from Nogent. They had advanced in a north-easterly direction for a mile and a half, when Mandeman whispered to Michel that their destination was Le Bourget. The village was then half a mile distant from them and in the midst of a considerable plain, but the intervening ground was deluged with water. A small river, the Moleret, passes by the village, and discharges itself into the Seine below St Denis. This the Prussians had dammed, and the water spread itself over the country, in some places converting it into a morass, in others forming pools here and there of a dangerous depth. Of the high road the Prussians of course had complete possession, and there was no question except of attacking them directly and forcing an entrance. The halt had lasted a few moments when Michel touched Mandeman upon the arm and said to him,

‘Did you not say it was the Prussians who flooded the plain here?’

‘Yes.’

‘That must have been by stopping the river?’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘And the river could only be stopped by a dam?’

‘Of course.’

‘Well, what is to prevent a few of us getting across that dam and into the village while the principal attack is made in front?’

‘Voss, thank Heaven every day you say your prayers that you have no genius.’ And he called to his commander hastily and acquainted him with Michel’s idea. The latter said the situation of the dam was not well known, and the result of an attempt by it was uncertain; but Mandeman represented to him that none of the force originally intended for the expedition would be drawn off, and that it would merely occupy some supernumeraries, and at last he obtained the officer’s consent to the undertaking.

‘Voss, I should dearly like to accompany you,’ said he, ‘but I have had so much difficulty in getting our chief to allow the adoption of your plan at all, that I know it would be out of the question to obtain permission for myself. Your piece of masterly strategy is only assented to because you are yourself superfluous. How fortunate for you that you are not a man of genius or this treatment would make you tear your hair——’

‘The regulation cut is very short, monsieur,’ interrupted Michel, drily.

‘And, your Honour, there are many chances of getting it clipped by a Prussian bullet or sword,’ added Mike Mahony.

‘Go, my friend, and make your game—and—

Voss—keep your hair upon your head and your head where it is.'

'Thanks, monsieur, I will try.'

Michel's plan was readily caught up by his comrades, though it involved peculiar hardships and difficulties. It meant an immediate abandonment of the high road, and the endeavour to find a track across the swampy country; but such conditions of campaigning had become tolerably familiar to them. There was no hesitation, therefore, as they plunged mid-leg deep into the fosse which separated the high road from the fields and gardens, and they scrambled their way to shallower water briskly. There were no lights in the village that they could see, and they were deficient, therefore, in guidance; but the quick ear of Michel had caught the sound of falling water, and rightly guessing it to be the overflow of the dam, he used it as an indication of what they should aim at.

'May I never,' said Mike Mahony, as he drew one of his feet out of the morass with a hissing sound, 'if it wouldn't be easy to persuade me I was at home in the barony of Clanwilliam again.'

'Is all your country under water?' asked Barbet.

'No; some people would wish it was. It's only the best part of it that is.'

'Hush!' said Michel. 'What is that?'

'Some of them Prussians talking.'

'They are setting sentries, I think. If we could only see whether it is on this or the other side of the river.'

'What difference does it make?' asked Barbet.

'Difference! A great deal. If it were on this side we might dispose of him without a shot.'

Creeping cautiously forward, they arrived within fifty paces of the bank, and, by the dim light, themselves under the shelter of the bushes, they could see a sentry pacing to and fro, while sounds from a little distance behind him intimated that a guard was on duty.

'Mike,' said Michel, 'you remember how we managed at Neuilly. I will cross the dam. If he fires bring him down—'

'And you go down with him?'

'Oh, not much fear of that.'

'Michel,' protested Mike eagerly, 'you are so anxious to expose yourself that in this case at all events you are not counselling right. There are a lot over there. Let us take the dam at a rush when the sentry has his back turned. The last man can cover him.'

'The Sergent Irlandais is right,' said Barbet.

'Well,' said Michel slowly, 'I do not wish to be too obstinate; have your way. Who will volunteer to be last? No one? Come, Barbet, will you?'

'Last? Ay, or first, I don't care which.'

'Good. You are an excellent shot. Keep

your eye on the sentry. Don't touch him until he sees us.'

'Content,' replied the taciturn soldier, and the arrangement was made.

Watching carefully until the sentry had passed the dam, Michel stepped out from the bushes behind which the conversation had taken place, followed by the rest, Barbet bringing up the rear. There were bushes up to within ten paces of the bank, which afforded some cover, and here a halt was made until the sentry had once more passed. Then with a silent gesture Michel rose from the stooping posture in which he had rested, and advanced swiftly to the dam followed by his comrades. He was actually over on the other bank, and his comrades close behind, when the sentry in his right-about was startled by the sight of the strange figures. A cry issued from his lips, and he was raising his piece to his shoulder, when a shot from the other bank rang through the night air and his arm flew wildly up, struck by a bullet from Barbet's rifle. A second or two and the adventurers are all landed. Not intending to do more than make a diversion for the main attack, Michel now abandoned all caution and bade his party fire a volley in the direction in which he had heard the voices of the guard. A groan told that it had not missed its mark, and a hasty dropping shot or two indicated that the enemy were rushing to their arms. But now a heavy

valley from the entrance of the village proved that the signal had been caught up, and that the assault was actually commenced. Up the long street of the village sounds of alarm were heard. Windows could be heard flung up, doors slammed violently, and a deep chorus of German oaths was borne down on the light night wind. The guard, who were before our adventurers, had evidently fled.

'Be cautious, men,' said Michel, 'in getting out of this lane, as our own friends may take us for the enemy, and shoot us down.'

'I know a way to manage that,' said Mike.

'How?'

'Give a hurroo, and be after them Prussians. Our fellows will have sense to know the Prussians aren't likely to have much fancy for hurraing under the present circumstances.'

Mike without more ado set up a shout of triumph which was taken up by the mobiles, and soon both parties joined set about clearing the houses from which an odd shot was dropping occasionally.

'What is that?' said Barbet nervously, as a white figure darted out of a dwelling they were approaching.

'It's the ghost of that sentry you shot below there.'

'Good Heavens! there's another of them.'

Mike burst into a loud fit of laughter. 'Bar-

bet, just look at the cut of him. Wouldn't you swear it was one of the fat sergeants we heard getting the wiggling down at Neuilly? At all events, you needn't be afraid. It never could be a ghost that was so fat as that fellow.'

From the houses forms in all sorts of undress were seen scampering—a few armed, most having left weapons, helmets, and portions of their dress behind. Mike and Barbet entered one room in which they saw a light. It was only a poor candle stuck in a bottle. An extemporized table was there, and on it a greasy pack of cards. A helmet lay on the floor at one side of the table; at the other was a long pipe with a china bowl.

'Well,' said Mike, contemplating the relic curiously, 'now I see them fellows must have got a fright, and no mistake. I'll bet a hundred pounds against my property in Ireland—and that's long odds I can tell you—that the fellow that owned that pipe would rather have left his Lieschen and his papa and mamma behind him. And its a queer thing, too, them Germans having a fancy to smoke out of a thing like that, about the size and shape of a musket. Now a bit of clay that comes under the nose filled with Limberick twist——'

'Our men are under the window, we had better come down and join,' interrupted Barbet.

'Barbet, you're a good fellow, and very pleasant company in a church tower, but 'pon my soul

I'm afraid that sensible instruction is thrown away on you.'

'They are calling the roll below.'

'Are they? All right. I'll answer my number.'

'Ha, bon Irlandais,' said Mandeman, as they descended, 'you and your brave leader did your work well. Our part of it was awfully stupid. It was like that ridiculous saying attributed to Cæsar, we came, we saw—no, peste, that's the worst of it—we didn't see. I protest to you upon my honour that now that I may call myself one of the captors of Le Bourget I haven't seen a German to-night.'

'May be, monsieur, you didn't recognize them in the new uniform Barbet and I saw them in.'

'What is that?'

'Well, its very light marching order.'

'How?'

'A night shirt and a helmet.'

'Ha, ha,' laughed Mandeman, 'I have not even seen that.'

'Monsieur,' said Michel, who had joined the group quietly, 'do not distress yourself about not seeing the Germans. I am greatly mistaken if you have long to wait.'

'You think so?'

'A number of them have taken refuge in the church and appear as if they were disposed to try to hold it.'

‘Well, we ought not to have any difficulty in driving them out.’

‘No doubt, but there are others not far off.’

‘Ah, so much the better. I hate a capture without a little of a fight.’

‘I fancy monsieur will be gratified with a pretty heavy one.’

CHAPTER XXVI.

LE BOURGET, II.

‘**M**ANDEMAN,’ said the commander of the Franc-Tireurs of the press, ‘the Prussians must have had a much larger force here than we were led to believe. There is still a considerable body of them lodged in the church.’

‘You do not say so! We had better attack it at once.’

‘Well, no,’ said the commander, slowly, ‘I should not say so. We have nothing to force the door without exposing our men a good deal, and I would prefer to avoid unnecessary loss of life.’

‘Psha. Are we never to have a downright combat, but this accursed manœuvring and circumventing?’

‘Don’t talk like an impatient child, Mandeman. Have you one of your fellows good for an errand? If so dispatch him with this note to the General. I want him to send some cannon up to La Courneuve. Then we shall drive *messieurs* the Prussians out of the church without beat of drum.’

‘I could get you a messenger easily, trust-

worthy enough, ready to go through all perils, even the alert Sergeant Voss, but there is not adventure enough in your commission for him. A postman might do it. I will send a mobile.'

'Have a care, Mandeman. This is a much more serious business we are engaged in than you seem to think. Do you fancy that we are here behind the enemy's line? I doubt it. I feel confident that they have several batteries beyond this, and that to keep such advance as we have made, we shall have to fight hard.'

'If you really think that this is to be the scene of a combat that is quite another affair.'

'Whether it is or not, Mandeman, believe me that military duty ought to be always well performed—however insignificant for the time it may appear. A soldier should be always at his best.'

'I am rebuked. Well, I will get you my phoenix of scouts, my hero out of Cooper's romances, to be your envoy on this occasion.'

'Quick, and please without more words.'

In the dark it was not quite so easy to find an individual, especially as Michel belonged to a party who were mostly strangers to the general body. Most of the men were scattered amongst the houses, amusing themselves with searching for relics of the newly departed occupants.

'Finding a trail,' he mused to himself, 'is an uncommonly amusing process to read of in these

very pleasant romances of the American, but brought into practice it becomes dull and disagreeable. Now what would leather-leggings do in my case? Let me see. Have I the reflective faculty? Ha, eureka! Now if this notion prove correct I shall no doubt be tempted to take up the trade of path-finding altogether, and abandon my duties as a journalist. Voss, the indefatigable, will assuredly be down in the neighbourhood of the church. Where the carcase is—I mean where the Prussians are—he is sure to be not far off. Bravo, Mandeman—Hallo'—here a tumble into a pool, disturbed the current of his reflections. 'Disagreeable, decidedly dirty, I have no doubt, if one could only see, but concealment of dirt, at all events, is a grace the dark night gives us. But my idea! My idea is a sound one for a wager.'

Thus self-communing, Mandeman stumbled on in the direction of the church, keeping as keen a look-out as the murkiness of the night permitted. Before long he heard a voice the sound of which struck him as being one he had hearkened to a short time before, and he listened.

'I never mention his name now, I may say. It sets me wild to think of the head of the family being away down there in a Prussian prison, perhaps without a bit or a sup——'

'Oh, I am told,' said a grave voice, 'that the Marshal is still in Belgium, not being cured of

his wound, but that he will go to the prison where his soldiers are confined when he is well enough to travel.'

'A cheer for my idea, lads,' said Mandeman, as he crossed from the centre of the roadway and found the comrades sitting on a bench in the front of one of the houses.

'Certainly, sir,' said Mike, and he gave a whoop that rang with a startling effect through the village.

'Hallo, my friend, I did not design that you should have taken me so completely at the foot of the letter.'

'I always obey orders, sir.'

'Well, comrade, I do not know that I am in a position to give them to you. Truth to tell I would find it hard to say what my military rank is.'

'Well, you're a gentleman any way, and it would be hard if I wouldn't do that much to oblige your Honour.'

'You are very good, but I am not sure—I certainly am no authority on matters military—whether a shout at this hour of the night and under the present circumstances is the correct thing.'

'It would be better left alone, monsieur, as a matter of rule,' observed Michel quietly, 'but just now I don't think it makes much matter. They know well enough from other reasons that

we are here. But were you seeking us, monsieur ?

‘I was. Our commander wants a messenger to go to the fort.’

‘And you intend me for the task ?’

‘Yes, I thought of you.’

‘I am ready, monsieur.’

‘But ah, I have been thoughtless. You have marched from Nogent this morning, have had a fatiguing expedition here——’

‘Bah, monsieur, that is nothing. I am ready to set out as soon as you desire.’

‘Your clothes seem to me dripping with wet.’

‘They will dry as I go on.’

‘Have you been keeping watch here ?’

‘We have not been set as sentries, but Miko and myself thought we would see what the Prussians in the church meant to do. Barbet will relieve him in an hour or two.’

‘If some of them fellows don’t come out and relieve me.’

‘There is not much fear of that.’

‘Well, if any of them does I know that what will alarm the guard is likely to startle him.’

‘What do you mean ?’ asked Mandeman.

‘Why, if the sound of my rifle reaches the ear of the guard, it is likely to alarm them, isn’t it ?’

‘No doubt.’

‘And if at the same time the bullet of the rifle

'~~Whether the war of the Prussian it's likely to~~
~~bring out the best in them.~~'

'~~There sure is a perfect man Irelandais.~~'

'~~Indeed, not: let anything keep you away too~~
~~long, there some of these infernal Prussians, may~~
~~be so pressing with you.~~'

'~~Indeed, indeed, in such.~~'

Having received his instructions from the chief
of the expedition, he started off, not to Auber-
ville, but to St. Jennes, which was about equi-
distant. With a light foot and a keen eye it was
no wonder he would delay long upon the road, and
as time so soon had elapsed before he found
himself at the place of destination. The arrival
of a messenger was eagerly looked for, and he
was shown at once to the quarters of the General.
The latter, who was seated amongst some officers,
sprang up on seeing the dispatch Michel had
brought with him, and tore it open. 'Ha,' he
said as he ran his eye over it. 'Famous, "only
slightly wounded," capital! "Assistance," to be
sure. All we can. How many are under arms,
Colonel?'

'A regiment and some artillery.'

'Let them move on at once to Courneuve. He
tells me that some of the Prussians are shut up in
the church. A shell or two will soon send them
flying out of that.'

'You have not said who is to take command.'

'Yourself, of course. I mean this to be serious.

I will follow you in the course of a few hours with as good aid as I can muster. We have begun well, and it is a pity not to follow the thing up. The old Breton, however, has no heart in this business, and lends me no assistance.'

'Indeed?'

'He says he does not care for partial attempts at all. By the time he has drilled his troops below there, so as to be fit for action in his view, Paris will have had to surrender to mere hunger.'

The Colonel coughed.

'Ah, I understand—you are quite right.' The presence of Michel made it unseemly that the conduct of the Commander-in-chief should be discussed. 'Tell me, friend,' said the General, 'what you know of this business. Were you in the expedition from D'Aubervilliers?'

'As supernumerary, mon général.'

'How is that?'

'My party and I belong to Nogent.'

'And you came up here for the variety of the thing, I suppose?'

'Something like that, monsieur.'

'Well, and what do you think of this affair now? Has it satisfied you?'

'It has been very well begun, monsieur.'

'Begun?'

'The enemy has been driven out everywhere except from the church, but—I say it with re-

spect, monsieur le général—they will return with far greater force.'

'What is your idea of greater force?'

'An army, monsieur le général.'

'An army!'

'When we have beaten away a sentry out of a place they send a guard; when we worry a guard they send a company; if we harass a company so that it cannot stand they send a battalion. This is a serious affair, and they will try as usual to have ten to one.'

The general laughed. 'My friend, I see you are no fool, but I fancy you a little exaggerate the force we shall have to encounter. Go,' added he kindly, 'you had better take some rest, and in the morning you can attach yourself to my party. You have no objection, I suppose, to join in the expedition again?'

'I should esteem it a great disgrace and disappointment to be left out of it, monsieur le général.'

'Well, we shall not inflict that punishment upon you for your good behaviour. Go, sleep and be ready for action.'

When Michel lay down the whole fort was alive with preparations for the departure of troops. The heavy wheels of cannon rumbled over the stones of the pavement, the tread of the horses rang in echoes through the galleries of the fort, while the voices of busy men were loud and at a little dis-

tance as it seemed even tumultuous. But to his fatigued senses they only acted as a lullaby. No infant at his mother's breast slept more peaceably or more soundly, and the bugle call which summoned him to parade had rung its notes twice or thrice before he started from his hard, but oh, how welcome couch.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LE BOURGET, III.

IT was noon when Michel joined the party under the command of the General. Another regiment of mobiles, and another regiment of the line with a few cannon, formed the force, to which Michel attached himself as a volunteer. It was not a long march to the village, and when they arrived there it was found to be clear of Prussians. The General gave orders to have the place strengthened as much as possible, provisions brought up, and every other precaution needed to hold the place adopted. It was a busy scene. Entrenchments were dug in the streets, barricades erected, and the walls of the houses were loop-holed for musketry. But this did not go on long peaceably. Michel had not been half-an-hour engaged at his share of the task, which was slitting a neat aperture in a house prominently situated at the German side of the village, when the familiar roar of a shell caught his ear. Then came another and another.

‘Upon my honour,’ remarked Mike to his comrade, ‘them Prussians remind me of Sir Gerald

Malowney's driver. He used never to be easy except when serving notices to quit. But I suppose we're not going ?'

'Not until we are driven.'

'And will we be driven, though ?'

'Not without a fight, but I doubt if our force is big enough.'

'It's a murder we can't see where them cannon are blazing from.'

'It would be of no possible use. The chassepot is a good weapon but it does not carry like a shell.'

'Here, by the hokey, my bit of architecture is done. Is yours ?'

'Yes, pretty well.'

'Come out, then, and look about. I'd rather be killed by a shell in the open air than by a tile tumbled off the roof. Do you know that there's been grand spreeing going on ?'

'How so ?'

'Nobody thought the Prussians would have left anything after them—no more would they, I suppose, only for the haste they went off in—but they did. Sausages of all sizes, and what the boys care more for—wine—a great many casks.'

'Wine !'

'Yes, I don't think much of it as a prize myself, though I've no objection to a swig in warm weather. But, after all,' continued he thoughtfully, and half-addressing himself, 'what an extra-

ordinarily nature it is a whole time-tribute of them
have never learnt of *conscience* + *sin*.

I am very sorry, said Michael, to hear of this
thirsting of the wine. I have heard that our
mobiles and indeed our men of the line too, have
once his business taken to drinking a great deal.

Drinking what?

No brandy—anything.

It's a pity. But what harm about this wine?

Harm? Why I fear they will drink it and get
drunk.

Drunk? shouted Mike. Is it in fact?
Glorious to God, if they can get drunk on that
way—why it's no wonder the Prussians should
beat them.

Ah, my dear friend, believe me it is not good
to be drunk either on weak wine or strong spirit,
and the stoutest men for endurance of fatigue and
the steadiness of nerve, will always be found those
who take least of strong drinks.

'But what, I wish a great many in Ireland were
of your way of thinking.'

As the two soldiers strolled into the street the
shells rattled and fizzed and burst about them, but
they had grown too much accustomed to the peril-
ous noise to regard it much. Not so, however,
with all the working parties. Many of the mobiles
had never seen a hostile shot before, and they be-
came fidgetty. It is startling on your first day's
acquaintance with fire to see your neighbour's

head taken off, and it is difficult not to recollect that it may be your own turn next, even though the doctrine of chances be in your favour.

‘That is a heavy fire, and discomposes the men,’ remarked the general to the colonel of the Franc-tireurs.

‘Yes, it is trying on young soldiers.’

‘Could we not annoy the enemy in some way so as to check that bombardment?’

‘I will get you a few sharp-shooters who may be able to do something.’ Mandeman was summoned, and asked if he thought he could do aught. His mind immediately reverted to his allies from Nogent, whom he sought out and found. His proposition was heartily received, and a party of some forty men went in loose order to the outskirts of the enemy’s position. It was a perilous task because there was a wide range of soldiers outside and in the rear of the guns, but the nature of the ground, covered with odd houses, enclosures, orchards, vegetable gardens, and the hundred interruptions natural to a suburban country part gave them a chance. They used it well, dropping an annoying rifle-fire from here and there, from the front, as it were the very mouth of the cannon, from the flanks in the midst of half a regiment, from the rear, whither it was believed impossible a Frenchman could get through the enemy. And it could not be extinguished. Several of the assailants perished amidst a shower of balls. One

was actually blown to pieces by a shell from a gun whose artillerist he had twice dropped. But though it cost themselves dearer than any expedition in which they had yet been engaged, they felt that it attained its object in interrupting the pounding fire which had taken place earlier in the day, and threatened to reduce the village to ashes.

They were especially beset by cavalry, but they made the horsemen pay dear. A sabre was lifted over the head of M. Derobant. 'That's not fair,' said Mike Mahony to his companion. 'A bullet in Monsieur's hat is the correct thing, but to slice it down with a sword, oh, no.' He fired and M. Derobant's hat was saved.

'My friend,' said the elderly journalist, 'I fancy I have to thank you for my life.'

'Oh, never mind, your Honour. In truth it was the hat I was thinking of. If I had let that fellow slash away at it, there wouldn't be enough left to swear by.'

Their return to the village was a depressing enough affair. They were congratulated on the accomplishment of their task, but only half the number received the compliment. 'But not one, thank God,' said Michel, 'is a prisoner.'

A day's work such as they were engaged in pretty well disposed them for repose. Michel, however, as he retired to his quarters, could not help a sad glance at the scenes of revelry he saw

houses where mobiles and regulars were the wine which the Prussians had them. But that did not hinder a which, however, was not protracted long. The companions started up suddenly and grasped their arms. It was the sounds of conflict reached their ears. A hasty glance showed them that the situation was serious.

'As I'm a living sinner,' said Mike, 'the Prussians have done our own thing.'

'Ah, the wine, the accursed wine,' was the only answer.

A barricade was just below them at the street. Its defenders were keeping up a fire, but it was opposed to a heavy attack. The bursting of shells mingled with musketry.

'We can do no good here. Our place would be at the other side of the house. Better go to the barricade.'

'All right,' answered Mike, and he stepped down cheerfully to take the fray. Their press acquaintances were before them, and greeted them heartily. 'Come, my brave companions,' said Mike in his usual gay fashion. 'Do you know what I have been granted?' he said, in a low tone, 'I am having wine granted in an abundant fashion.'

‘As how?’

‘In point of odds. They have sent a whole corps d’armée against us here.’

‘I thought they would. What force have we?’

‘Less than two regiments of regulars, and less than two of mobiles.’

‘Then we shall be driven out, and have only to make the expulsion as costly as we can.’

‘Do not say that. Let us resolve to win the victory.’

‘I am content if we can.’

‘For hours the contest of fire went on. The old features were observable. As the Prussians grew fatigued, or had expended their ammunition, they were replaced by fresh troops, while the French could not stir from their post, and they stood in the midst of the dead, and had hardly spare hands enough to remove the dying. But there was no flinching. The mobiles, who yesterday fretted like untrained horses under the terrible missiles, stood in the midst of the deadly rain as coolly as old soldiers. Their own fire still lacked steadiness, but it was energetic and not without effect. It was evident the enemy was baffled, and had not got all the advantage he expected from his surprise. There was a cessation of fire on his side.’

‘What now, are they retiring?’ asked one of the defenders.

A mitrailleuse was behind the crest of the barricade.

‘ Make ready, men,’ called the officer in charge.

Scarcely a moment had passed when a cheer was heard outside the barricade, and amidst the smoke the huge forms of the Prussian guards were seen bayonet in hand.

A counter-cheer rose from the defenders. The grunt of the mitrailleuse was heard and a line was cut through the rank of the advancing foe; but they were spread across the whole street. Then the rifles poured in upon them their fire, and they fell in heaps. Still they pressed on, the very weight of those behind lending them an impetus which was not to be resisted. At last they are up on the barrier. But now comes the wild French cry! and bayonet crosses bayonet, and the fury of the defenders matches the impetuosity of the onset. Hurrah, hurrah is shouted on either side. No thought of one’s own life now, only take that of the enemy — stab, thrust, hurl them down! Over the barricade they go at last. Cheer again, they are driven off, and now load and fire! And the heavy tide of the foe surges slowly back, after having paid a deadly penalty. It is, however, but the beginning. On they come again, reinforced by fresh and yet greater numbers, and the scene is repeated, each time the number of the defenders growing less, and their wearied energies more inadequate to supporting the unequal contest.

'You are fatigued, sir,' said Michel to M. Dero-bant, 'this struggle is too hard for you.'

'Derobant,' said Mandeman, 'go back. You have done knight's service. I swear I will become of your opinion with reference to the Second Chamber——'

'Mandeman, and you, friends, I thank you for your solicitude,' replied the old man simply, 'but I cannot do it. My conviction is that being beaten in such affairs as this only paves the way to being beaten everywhere. My poor old arm cannot do much, but so long as I can lift it, it must be at my country's service. And, indeed,' he added, 'as things look now, I do not know that to be slain at a barricade is the worst thing that can happen to one who loves France.'

For the first time that day Mandeman's bright face became clouded.

'I admire your courage, but I cannot help deploring your obstinacy—but,' the old smile breaking out again, 'you were always obstinate, you will not be content with my yielding to you on the point of the Second—but, hallo, here are our friends again. Once more, bullets and bayonets.'

And once again the harassed troops were brought to the edge of the barricade to keep it against the new foe. This time the latter appeared more numerous and more furious than ever. They were smarting under the shame of their first

surprise, and of their repeated repulses, and they rushed with savage energy at their task. They swarmed up the barricade, getting a farther footing than they had yet attained. Derobant advancing to the front was caught in the rush, and by the mere weight of the shock was flung down. A tall guardsman planted his foot upon his knee and pointed his bayonet at the prostrate body. 'You scoundrel,' said Mike Mahony, 'Ruffian,' exclaimed Mandeman, and two bayonets met in the body of the foe. 'Save him,' called Mandeman, 'Or die,' called Mike Mahony with a shout, and around the recumbent figure they fought with fury. Again, but yet more slowly, the foe was impelled back over the barricade, but by men so exhausted that they could scarcely raise a cheer over their own exploit.

Mandeman raised his fallen friend. 'Cheer up, Derobant, cheer up, brave heart. Heavens! oh, what was our success for? He is dead. Noble, brave old man, true lover of your country—the breath trampled out of your body by the tread of these canaille of invaders! oh, oh!' and tears burst from the eyes which usually shone with so joyous a light.

'Perhaps the old gentleman, sir, is as good out of this rough work, and it could hardly end otherwise. There is only one thing left——'

'Galant Irlandais, I understand you. We will make these rascals pay a penalty for his

death, though I care not,' with a sigh, 'how soon they take my own.'

'By jaspers, sir, and here they just are about to do it,' said Mike, as a new rush by the enemy became perceptible.

By this time the barricade and the entrenchment were but a name. Between the pounding of the cannon and the trampling at both sides, the height was flattened out and the hollow so filled that it was really little more than an inequality of ground. This, of course, facilitated the task of the assailants, and made the position of the defenders yet more desperate. Still the resistance was valiant and bloody. Still the wearied men paid back thrust for thrust, and dealt such strokes as thinned the ranks of the foe. Mandeman rushed frantically forward, striking about him with the utmost fury and with deadly effect. But in the bayonet contest it is hard to escape long with impunity. Mike, separated from him by two Prussian guards, saw him fall. 'Michel,' he cried, 'save Mandeman, he is down.' A hearty response from his friend answered him. With set teeth Mike whirled and plunged with his bayonet and made his way to the fallen Franc-tireur of the Press.

As he stooped to raise him, a bayonet was prevented from entering his own side by a chop on the arm that held it from Michel's. The comrades, one fighting, the other bearing the burden, saw the fallen man out of the throng.

‘It is useless,’ said Michel, ‘I fear he is dead.’

‘No, he isn’t, but I am in dread he is not far off from it.’

As they spoke they laid him down. Mandeman opened his eyes faintly at first, and then more strongly. ‘Ah, friends, I go to follow Derobant. He was right. It is as good for a Frenchman to die, as to see France prostrated at the feet of an invader through the folly of her people, and the crimes of usurpers. Thanks to you for your brave help, but—it is—it is too late. Your hands.’

They placed their hands in his, but it was, to use his own phrase, ‘Too late.’ No pressure responded to theirs.

A new noise approached them. ‘Mike,’ said Michel, ‘he is spared the worst,’ and he pointed to the soldiers hurrying by, first singly, and then in a comparatively compact body, firing and keeping front to the enemy.

‘They are retreating?’

‘Le Bourget is lost.’

END OF VOL. II.

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